

Dr. Krishna Kant Misra
Retired Professor of Political Science
University of Allahabad

Residence :
M.I.G. 9 (S.F.S.) Govindpur
Opposite Upton
Allahabad- 211004

Date.....23-6-2001

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work, embodied in this dissertation entitled
"GOVERNANCE THROUGH COALITION IN INDIA : A CRITICAL
STUDY OF THE FRACTIONALISED MANDATE IN THE NINETIES"
is the original work of the candidate – Yogendra Chandra Singh, and is
suitable for submission for the award of the D.Phil. Degree in Political
Science by the University of Allahabad. The candidate has fulfilled the
requirements of the attendance, and stay.

K K Misra
(PROF. K.K. MISRA)
Supervisor

To
mother
for instilling in me the faith for life through her
saga of spirited struggles

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a study about the pursuit of power and authority by the people, and State in India. Power and authority are elusive, subject not only to the frailties of human design, but also the ever changing fortune – what some social scientists call conjunctures. It seeks to understand the governance through coalition in India with reference to the fractionalised mandate of the turbulent 1990s. This kind of analysis can benefit both Indian studies and the studies of comparative development. Following the election of a minority national government in the late 1989, observers of Indian politics have devoted considerable attention to the country's surmounting complexities of governance through coalitions. India's massive developmental challenges demand attention, but it has to be juxtaposed in the larger context — the unequal battle between the cultural and economic elites, and political/constitutional and other representative voices that apparently entered a decisive phase in the 'nineties'. The party system also seemed trying to adjust itself to the changed nature of political conflict in the aftermath of the retreat of the Indian State from the commanding heights of economy.

India's size and diversity pose immense difficulties for any study attempting to generalise about the polity as a whole. The country has larger electorate than that of the mature democracies of Western Europe and the United States put together, and probably as much ethnic diversity as is seen in all of Africa and Latin America combined. Thus, several organising principles have been adopted so as to make the task manageable.

It was clear from the beginning that any attempt to describe and explain the fractionalised mandate would have to

take into account both national and state trends. The building blocks for national trends are provided by state politics, and the actions of the central authorities often are aimed at winning, or manipulating the 'hearts and minds' of those on the political periphery. Given India's federal structure moreover, states-level governments often are significant political forces in their own right. And with the rise of regional parties in the 'nineties', a satisfactory account of India's transforming coalitional authority patterns must focus simultaneously on the central as well as state politics.

The "state" has been selected as the unit appropriate for the study of micro-political tendencies, because this research strategy has been applied effectively by other scholars in the past. In all, three states—namely, U.P., Maharashtra and West Bengal have been studied in order to tap some country's regional coalitional distinctiveness. Although the reasons for choosing these states will emerge in the course of the study, yet there is no real rationalisation for analysing three rather than four or seven states. Detailed study of more than three states would have been desirable, but three seems to be an optimal choice that would be manageable, as well as sufficient to capture important aspects of coalitional diversity within the defined scope of this study.

Herein, an important concern is how coalition patterns have changed over time, and background data are available, because the three states investigated here have been analysed by various scholars during the early and the middle of 1960s. The research for this study involve extensive interviews with participants, and observers of state politics, supplemented by those appearing in various magazines and journals. Also newspapers and published works have been consulted, both for background material, and for specific interpretations. These data are, then, compared with those from the earlier benchmarked

studies, providing insight into how and why India has become difficult to govern through the coalitions.

Although the electoral metamorphosis over time has led to the arrival of coalition era, its intensity varies from one region of the country to another. What is that has occurred is the subject of the second concern of this study. Comparative analysis of three selected states highlights why these changes have led to considerable breakdown of coalitional set-up in some states, but not in others. U.P. and Maharashtra are chosen as examples of states at different levels of developments, which have experienced growing political turmoil. The U.P.-Maharashtra comparison allows a distinction between different types of breakdowns, and helps to delineate some of the reasons for breakdown, including the significance of 'levels of development'. The interesting case of West Bengal allows a careful verification of the argument, because it is one of the few Indian states in which stability has been restored after a prolonged period of disorder.

The third major concern of this study is how, and with what success the coalitions at the Centre have dealt with the spiralling complexities of governance. Role of political elites, in this context, is well known, and is not discussed separately in great details, but rather woven throughout the study. However, the changing nature of coalition at the Centre since 1989 needs to be investigated. In order to do so, this study analyses how the Centre under subsequent coalitions, managed economic policies and how they have dealt with troubled political institutions, and inherent relationships, such as that between the parliament and the judiciary. This focus on the actions of the ruling elites provides a microcosm for interpreting nature of power, and authority trends of the coalitions at the national level.

The research on economic policy is based on newspaper reports, articles, and work done by political economists. By

contrast, the account of how ruling elites have managed political institutions depends more heavily on periodicals and journals. Direct interviews did not reveal much in this area, as senior leaders often were secretive, or reluctant to discuss issues concerning their parties, and various policy initiatives. Journals and newspapers, by contrast, with their established channels, seemed to carry so much matter on these issues, that one wonders if there are any political secrets in India.

Data collected on three states, and on three crucial sets of issues—the political institutions, political economy, and national pluralism and federalism—constitute the core empirical materials on which this study is based. The two levels of the polity are analysed with the aim of charting and explaining governance through coalition in India. Each of the two levels of analysis can help in answering the three interrelated questions: How have authority patterns changed over time? Why do patterns of political turmoil vary across regions? What are the implications of the changed political context for the government's capacity to govern India? The rationale of inquiry in each of the three sections is comparative, either over time, or across regions, and issue—areas within the country.

The study is organised into six chapters including the conclusion. The first chapter is Introduction devoted to a primordial discussion of the problem, and the framework, defining the nature, aim and scope of the study, and the working hypothesis in form of the argument. Relationally, conceptual, and theoretical issues comprising explicit definitions of the units of the study have also been dealt herein.

Next four chapters that follow constitute the core of the study. The second one presents the trends of political change, analysing the socio-cultural setting, recent evolution of the Indian party system from the standpoint of coalition, views of the players, and electoral politics. Chapters three delineates the

experiences of U.P., Maharashtra and West Bengal-three states, in context of inter-play between social structure, and political terrain of the state. It also analyses the backdrop, and the variables, which provided state coalitions definite shapes, and relative results, ranging for instability to relative stability. Chapter four focuses on the Centre, examining the interplay of institutional and extra-institutional matrices in the context of political instability and analysing and evaluating the environmental, structural and operational dimensions of the coalition politics. Chapter five looks into the policy and administrative aspects of the coalition politics with reference to political institutions, political economy and federalism and national pluralism.

Final inferences are provided in the concluding sixth chapter. What has changed and the how and why of those changes are discussed in summary form. Also discussed here in is the analytical and normative significance of the Indian material and of the emphasis on political variables, as causal factors for the more general study of governance through coalitions in developing countries.

The support of a number of individuals, and institutions has been crucial in the making of this study. First, and foremost, it is with deepest gratitude that I acknowledge the stimulating guidance, valuable comments, suggestions and continuous encouragement given by my supervisor, Prof. K.K. Misra, which has helped me clarify and refine the presentation of the study.

I am beholden to my teachers, the Department of Political Science, Allahabad University for providing my intellectual base. Their kindness, and support were indispensable for the discussion of some specific problems. I owe a special debt to Bibek Debroy, Imtiaz Ahmad, E. Sridhar, A.M. Zaidi and Yogendra Yadav for their responses and comments on various chapters.

I am very thankful to staff at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, the Parliament House Library, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, the Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Contemporary Studies, New Delhi; the Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow; the Allahabad University Library, and the G.B. Pant Institute of Social Sciences, Allahabad, for helping me search for documents and other material.

Over the years, I have gained much from exchanges and discussions on Indian politics with a number of colleagues and friends at the Allahabad University and other institutions. This includes many people not involved in the writing of this study. For their camaraderie and support, I thank Vrishank Goswami, Sandeep Bhargava, Hemant Kumar, Subhash Shukla, Pradeep Sharma, Shasikant Pandey, Hariom Singh, Ajay Pathak and Vineet Mathur for many stimulating discussions on politics and society in India. My thanks to Pradeep Sharma are of a different order. He has been a constant source of ideas, criticisms, and full of warm hospitality during my stay in Delhi. He has also been generous to help in locating library related, and other research material.

Finally, some personal thanks. As always, the love of my grandma, parents, brother, sister, and uncles has been an important sustaining force. Neelam, my wife, deserves special thanks, as she was there with encouragement when this study was no more than a gleam in the eye.

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Politics as a spectacle, is a somewhat non-edifying spectacle. It is said, 'the more things change, the more they remain the same.' For five times in the 1990s, and three in its last years, continuously we have been given the chance to choose a new set of rulers. "Elections promise not just participation, and representation, a chance to pitchfork to the centre-stage issues of interest and identify, but also represent the prospect of bettering our choice set."¹ Yet in retrospect, the dominant mood of the 'nineties', did not seem of expectation but apprehension. Ubiquitous uncertainty gripping the electorate, and even more, the political class-parties, and politicians. Partly, this has to do with the increasing frequency of elections, a process which generates not just an exhaustion with electoral politics, but, at least in certain sections, an alienation from the very idea of democratic politics. Even more enervating has been the issue of the electorate not knowing who or what to choose from.

Each of our political parties has been in a state of disarray. Deeply afflicted by insecurity, given the steadily decreasing incumbency factor, they didn't want to face the electorate. The declining duration of 'rule' has further pushed them into a culture of expediency, wherein winning has become the 'be all and end all' of politics, making policies and programmes a casualty. This pathetic political scenario depicts fractured verdict and hung parliaments – the fractious coalition politics in the 1990s.

When viewed bottom up, this volatile political phenomenon implicitly articulates the competing discourses of secularism,

1. Ian Mclean : *Public Choice- An Introduction* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987); op. cit., p.6

social justice and stability being mediated by a stronger assertion of regional, local and hitherto marginal players in electoral politics. Equally significant has been the increased electoral participation of the schedule castes, tribes, women and youth, when no longer did the earlier vote-bank politics prevailed.

Given the fragility of our state structures and institutions, the chances that we will evolve workable 'rules of the game' do not appear high. Our elite is already expressing a 'disgust' with politics in vogue. "Their discourse on politics is marked by a strong preference for a stable (read authoritarian) form of governance."¹ Witness the demands for a presidential system, or a national government-anything to ensure the dissociation of policymaking (particularly economic) from the hurly-burly of politics. The elite may also well enjoy the privilege of withdrawal. But for the others, this is a non-option. We have to engage with the current political process as both voters and actors, extending our demands, and struggles for transparency, and accountability.

[A] THE PROBLEM

The coalition politics in the 'nineties' occurred in a historical setting,² marked by two major trends. First, the emerging sharp conflict between the best interests of the Indian State, and the demands the political class made on the

1. Rajni Kothari : *Growing Amnesia* (New Delhi, Viking, 1993) ; op. cit., p. 46.

2. These and many, other relevant points to socio-political change in India between late 80s and in early 90s are made in Francine Frankel and M.S.A. Rao: *Dominance and State Power in India : Decline of a Social Order*, (New Delhi, OUP, 1989); Myron Weiner: *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics*, edited by Ashutosh Varshney, (OUP, 1989); N.S. Saksena: *India Towards Anarchy 1967-1992* (New Delhi, Abhinav Pub., 1993); Arthur Bonner : *Averting the Apocalypse: Social Movements in India Today* (Durham, Duke Univ. Press, 1990); Atul Kohli : *Democracy and Discontent-India's Growing Crises of Governability* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991).

governments. In fact, it is possible to argue, that most of the problems the country faces today can be traced to the failure of the political class to temper its own voracious demands; the consequent toll these have taken on the efficacy of the Indian State (Fig. 1.1). So much so, that the spectre of soft state, presumably buried by the end of 1971, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was anointed as the empress of India, is beginning to haunt us again. Because in modern day politics the capacity of a government to clear off any substantial agenda depends upon the extent of political agreement, and consolidation that it can bring about. Absence of such a consolidation deters friendly soul from standing up, and being counted, while it encourage adversarial forces to test the limits of the political dispensation's ingenuity.¹

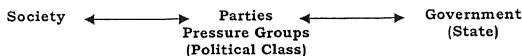


Figure 1.1 : The Liberal Model of Society-Party-Government Link

This correlation between performance and its political requirements needs to be noted carefully because in coalition, political arrangement can endure only as long as the partners feel that their participation in it would bring them dividends, organisational or ideological, which they would otherwise not be able to achieve. This implies that the leaders of coalition-constituents should not only feel that they have affected the perceptions of their foes and friends, but have also addressed

1. For a detailed analysis see Arand Lijphart : *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*; (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1977); Robert Dahl: *'Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press. See especially Kart Cohen: . *Democracy* (New York, Free Press, 1971); Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and S.M. Lipset; *Democracy in Asia*, (New Delhi, Vistar Pub., 1989).

satisfactorily the expectations their followers have of the coalition.

"The other historical trend underlined the retreat of liberalism in India."¹ Insofar as liberalism, values and, stresses procedural norms, and insofar as its accent is on behavioural restraints, a liberal environment is a necessary condition for coalition politics. However, by the 'nineties', the country had visibly turned its back on the kind of political sensibility, and nuances that were nurtured during the Nehru era. The rise to prominence (even dominance) of new breed of politicians heralded the unmistakable demise of the liberal temper. However, it should also be noted that these would not have been able to acquire the kind of ascendancy they have acquired, but for the fact that the three decades of liberalism failed to move the country decisively from the status-quo. Nonetheless, this unmistakably, mitigates against the coalition politics.

The polity continued to groan under number of contradictions, some of which predated the 'nineties', being qualitatively as well as quantitatively sharpened and amplified due to the exigencies of coalition politics; other being invariable compulsive outcome of such arrangement.² Some of these contradictions overlapped, some sharply, and violently manifested, while others were expressed in somewhat muted voices. However, each of these, time and again became extremely volatile, but all were and still are, simultaneously, a manifestation of the Indian State's crisis of legitimacy.³

1. Rajni Kothari : *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*, (New Delhi, Ajanta Pub., 1988); op. cit., p. 51.

2. G.K.Reddy : "Erosion of Established Procedures", *The Hindu*, (Aug. 12, 1998)

3. Bhabani Sen Gupta : "Making the Country Governable", *Indian Express*, (Feb. 13, 1997).

The most acute contradiction manifested was that between the Centre and periphery. While Kashmir continued to bother our and national conscience, the entire north-eastern region still is to become a part of mainstream concern, where insurgency in various forms persisted, symbolic of the total alienation of a significant population at the periphery from the functionaries of the Indian state. Above all, with shrinking pan-Indian perspective, no political party can claim to democratically aggregate their grievances.

And, if the aforementioned contradiction became so acute, it was because another contradiction between the Hindu majority and the minorities had paralysed New Delhi's reflexes. Suddenly most metropolitans seemed vulnerable to the irrational demands of the majority-minority contradiction, because the instruments of the Indian State had been rendered ineffective. Overtly, everyone swore by secularism, pseudo or otherwise. But the fear, as expressed by the different parties who classified their 'other' as communal, was not just that if divided they would have fallen, but that those who did not fit into the 'nation' as imagined by the 'non-seculars', would have been permanently alienated if the ruling party changed.

Another contradiction that began to gnaw at the vitality of the polity was the reassertion of the regional elites, associated with the reimagination of the nation, partly encapsulated in the rubrics of federalism, and decentralisation, intending to protect their political and economic interests, New Delhi's preferences notwithstanding. Striking in defiant notes, the states ruled by these regional 'satraps' remained sore that the Centre deprived them of their fair share in the finances. States like Bihar, started

arguing, and with good reasons, that New Delhi was treating like an internal colony. Another dimension was added to this assertiveness with the sub-regional elites in areas like Chattisgarh in M.P., Uttarakand in U.P., Jharkand in Bihar and Darjeeling in West Bengal, demanding their identity and interests to be adequately protected and promoted.

While these three contradictions found expression in the changed of a liberalised global economic regime, they were at times also aggravated by the emerging mindset that questions the right of the nation-state to demand absolute obedience. Yet, interestingly enough, the same business class that clamoured for the dismantling of the licence raj, and argued that the restrictive regime was throttling the entrepreneurial potential of the Indian businessmen, was demanding that it should be protected against foreign competition¹. This created tension between the indigenous business community and the foreign investors making exacting demands on the Indian polity.

The other two contradictions - between the political class and public institutions, and between the elites and the masses, are overlapping. To start, all through the 'nineties' the political class sought to bypass, and where ever possible, subvert constitutional arrangements under which power can only be exercised in a lawful manner, all in the name of being the representative of the sovereign people². This eventually reduced the efficiency of the state, as all the instruments of governance got blunted. By and large, the political class conducted itself in a

1. "Delhi backs Bombay industrialist's demand for level-playing field", *The Economic Times*, 7 Nov, 1993.

2. Even Parliament, that most exalted club of the political class, no longer takes its job seriously. For example, during 1995-96 Budget session, grants of only five or six ministries were debated at some length, while those of 30-odd departments were passed without any discussion.

manner, as if it was not accountable for its excesses¹. This all too palpable indifference to moral qualms and constitutional norms proved infectious and other segments of the Indian elites also began imitating political crowd.

But, the final assertion came from the unwashed masses themselves, whose concern regarding social justice must equally be invoked in our political discourse on coalition governance. This social justice implies the accommodation of those lower down in caste hierarchy, the erstwhile excluded, in the structures of power. The concern remains - power need to pass on from the control of upper castes and classes. At the state level, the politics of such combinations has been entrenched. Outcome in U.P. in which backwards, Dalits, and Muslims, firmly turned down their back on the established political parties reflected the emergence of new social forces and actors hitherto not just out of power, but also unfamiliar with the working of our different institutions. The 'great battles' over reservations and Mandalisation are symptomatic of this tendency.

It is important to clarify at the outset that the study does not claim that the coalition crisis in government, means intimations of an imminent disaster.² On the one hand, the

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1. The government's own white paper on the Ayodhya Controversy and the various reports on the security scams reviled the extent to which established principles and procedures were subverted to enable the crooks and bullies to take liberties with the law of the land. The extent to which the political elites became self-centred, grown indifferent to greater public good was brought to the fore in the Harshad Mehta episode, and the botched up impeachments of Justice Ramaswamy, providing a glimpse of the growing public perception about misdemeanours in high places.
 2. The present study, while beeping itself by and large within the limits of normal definitions of 'crisis', goes several steps beyond, in effort to show that the skewedness of institutions of Indian democracy as well as its corpus of political and social values was inherent in the way in which the state was invented. The coalition crisis goes beyond the crisis of a political or social order. It appears to be demolishing the entire Western concept of Empire to Nation. There is lot of Empire-still in the Indian State and the Indian nation. It is getting beyond the will and abilities of the power elites to eliminate the Empire because they are acculturised in the legacy of Empire.

political class found that as it can do little to take on entrenched powerful interests, discretion list in making its peace with them.¹ On the other, the compulsions of a federal coalition in the polity have had introduced a healthy impulse to reach out, and reclaim the periphery. This in turn must be viewed as a part of a larger process in evolving a ruling culture suitable to the exigencies of a coalition era. The Indian political class seen trying to adjust innovatively to a situation in which all-India organisations and appeals no longer appeared to be working. The unsettled relationship between the Indian State, and the citizen continued to be mediated without much violence, and within the framework of discernible political legitimacy.²

Two further qualifications should be noted. First, India's political situation in the 1990s had some of the elements of both continuity, and change that characterised the pre-1989 situation. This study attempts to focus on all those changes in contrast to the elements of continuity, as emphasised in several studies,³ as emergent situation sufficiently making a trenchant critic of them.

Second, there are some elements of political and social change that tend to strengthen, rather than weaken India's

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1. For the view that a certain amount of power sharing was inherent even in the older arrangement, see Arand Lijphart: *The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation*, *American Political Science Review*, (90(2), June, 1996).
 2. For a thoughtful discussion of the nagging problem legitimacy and its implications, see, Subrata K. Mitra: "Governance and Political Institution in India after Independence", in Subrata K. Mitra and Dietmar Rothermund (eds): *Legitimacy and Conflict in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997). It notes that the political leadership remains alive to the needs to co-opt and propitiate those who choose to challenge the authority of the state.
 3. See Myron Weiner : "Congress Restored: Continuities and Discontinuities in Indian Politics", *Asian Survey* (22:4 April, 1993), pp. 334-55; Lloyd I and Susanne H. Rudolph: *In Pursuit of Lakshmi : the Political Economy of the Indian State* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987); Passim, but especially the conclusion. Jyotindra Dasgupta: "India: Democratic Becoming and Combined Development", Larry Diamond et.al. eds.: *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner, 1989), pp. 53-104.

coalition structure.¹ For example, by 1997, the Indian governing elites found themselves constrained to learn some to their cost, some to their advantage- the fundamental requirement of a constitutional democracy- the need for mutual restraint, respect and reconciliation. Consequently, the Indian polity was able to attend to the never-finished (and probably a never-finishable) basic task of democratic consolidation: making the Indian State forgo its roguish impulses and instead comprehend to respect the relentless logic of democratic urges and aspirations in an unequal and hierarchical society,² notwithstanding the middle classes' fashionable rubbishing of the political class, and despite the corporate sectors' inelegant impatience with the inherent uncertainties of parliamentary give and take.

A situation of political turmoil can always be viewed in different light, as a cup can be seen as half full, rather than half empty. Though the focus here is on the problems of India's governance through coalition, it is not because of failure to recognise the strengths and achievements of the "world's largest democracy."³ The focus on problem areas stems in part from a concern about visibly brokening down of the elite consensus that underwrote the Indian development experiments in the first four decades, till the early 1990s without any rebuilding taking its place. This focus of problems, moreover, stems from analytical

1. For understating of the requirements of restrained behaviour in a constitutional democracy, see Barry R. Weingast : "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law", *American Political Science Review*, June 1997.

2. This is supported by the results of various public opinion polls cited by Bashiruddin Ahmad and Samuel J. Eldersveld: *Citizen and Politics: Mass Political Behaviour in India* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).

3. See, Atul Kohli: "Democracy and Development" in John Lewis and Valerianna Kallab, eds. : *Development Strategies Reconsidered* (Washington D.C., Overseas Development Council, 1986), pp.153-182 highlighting in a broader comparative context, some achievements of India's democratic model of growth. Also see Yogendra Yadav : "The Idea of Democracy", *Seminar*(461, January 1998), pp. 58-61.

judgement that will be supported with evidence throughout the study: the polity no longer acquires its institutional efficacy from the effective presence of the prime-minister as the chief political executive, the process of governance came to be shaped by a dynamic interaction among various functionaries. How far this interaction was not allowed to overload the political system would point to the degree of maturity of coalition politics in the 'nineties.'

The purpose of the research is to analytically situate the coalition era of 'nineties' that emerged after the decline of "Congress System in India."¹ More important, this study attempts to explain how the coalition process has been involved in the decimation of established patterns of authority. Was that inevitable? The decline of all-India parties, the growing tension between avaricious governing elites confronted by a democratic insistence, pressed from new groups that have emerged as a consequence of political and economic development must be recognised as factors whose detrimental effect have been difficult to counter. On the other hand, many specific patterns of changes have resulted from deliberate political choices. The task of the analysis is to determine how "choices" have interacted with "inevitabilities" to produce this specific political outcome.

[B] **THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK**

This study arises, in part, from the surmounting concern with India's inefficient coalition structures. It offers empirical analysis based on data collected both from primary and

1. The term "Congress System" was coined by Rajni Kothari : "The Congress System' in India", *Asian Survey* (4:12, Dec., 1964), pp. 1161-73

secondary sources. It will become clear in due course that the argument developed here differs in important respects from a number of existing theories. Suffice is to note at this point, that both the descriptive picture and the analysis that emerge in this study are rather complex; there are no easily identifiable heroes and villains in the story narrated here.

Apropos broader issues, most theoretical models of political change, and development presented in the comparative political studies over the past two decades have emphasised the critical role of "the state."¹ Making a visible shift from society-centred explanations, criticising the enmeshed reductionist tendency within political sociology, the argument has been that there is a basic tension between the needs of strong state authority, and the increased demands for participating by populations mobilised by political parties, power elites and other in pursuit of multiple goals, which ultimately comes into conflict with each other, and with the broader public interest, which only an institutionalised autonomous state can pursue effectively. This view magnifies such demands for participation into a developmental 'crisis', threatening the state authority and civil order.²

1. The state-oriented literature on developing countries continues to grow. An incomplete list would include the following : Alfred Stephan : *The State and Society : Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1978); Robert H. Bates : *Market and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982); Nora Hamilton : *The Limits of State Autonomy : Post Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1983); Richard Sandbrook (with Judith Barker) : *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds. : *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); Atul Kohli : *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); Vivienne Shue : *The Reach of the State : Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1990); Joel Migdal : *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1994).
2. See Samuel P. Huntington : *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1968); eg. p. 24. Also Myron Weiner : "Political Participation; Crisis of the Political Process", in Binder et. al.: *Crisis and Sequences*, where he discusses the participation crisis in general , but does not share Huntington's view on it. In Indian context, Atul Kohli, for example, models his analysis of Indian problems of governability on the emphasis on political order as our essential prerequisite of development. See his *Democracy and Discontent in India*, pp. 3-21 and conclusion.

However, the political order approach poses two drawbacks. The first concerns the issues that are likely to be studied. Given the emphasis on the state as a social force, the question of how the state itself evolves may recede into background. The second drawback concerns the causal forces that are likely to be stressed. Social and economic forces are likely to be under-emphasised.¹ Also its overall stress tends to imply stability of the status-quo with gradualist, incremental change. So this theory cannot cope with the multiple challenges to the status-quo, which is evident in India in the 1990s.

Here, the view taken in the study of the role of the Indian state in coalition era of 'nineties' is different in most respects from the dominant theoretical models. It emphasises the struggle for power, and competing elites and individuals, which often cuts across the functional differentiation and specialisation of state institutions, bending them to the wills of the main contenders for power. The Indian State does not mainly respond to, and resolve or manage crisis arising from the environment, but is, through the actions of leaders, the principal agency directly, and indirectly responsible for their occurrence in the first place. The Indian State, in common with all other states, does not merely respond to the crisis produced by uneven economic development and social change, but is itself the leading force providing differential advantages to regional, ethnic groups and classes.² Although, it is true that the entrance of new groups into the political process in 1990s has often been accompanied by intensification of conflict and violence, it is of no scientific value to attribute these consequences to an objectified participation crisis. More specific explanations are required which will be provided in the course of the study.

1. Ibid., p.10.

2. Paul R. Brass : *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Cambridge Univ. Press , 1990), pp. 32.

Explanatory accounts of government, and legitimacy have so far mostly concentrated on re-distributive policies, as the main intervening factor. The exclusion of law and order management, and constitutional change are possibly due to the liberal bias, indicative of the confidence, that civil society itself should provide the necessary institutional restraints on individuals for self policing, leaving it to the state to legislate on the public goods. Nor does Western liberal democratic theory provide for the possibility, that the majority might actually prefer illiberal values, and use its legislative capacity to amend the constitution away from the values originally premised in it. Examination of these, and possibly other implications of the model requires an analysis of the perception of the representative actors, State's responses in the areas of the law and order management, re-distributive policies, and constitutional change.

A transactional model (Fig 1.2) anchored in aforementioned discourse, has the capacity to indicate a general conjecture about the nature of underlying causes of intense coalition disorder in the 'nineties', based on the evidences obtained from the secondary sources. Factoring in, the absence of effective political institutions, and political elites, who could combine rational protest with the instruments of the conventional participation, along with the anticipating, and accommodating part of the agenda of opposition formations, this model is able to account for more radical, and anomie political environment, which contributed to the instability of the central as well as the regional governments.

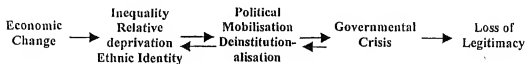


Figure 1.2 : The Transactional Model

Further, the transactional model emphasises that the Indian solution to the necessary 'coalition tension' needs to be framed in terms of creation of institutions, and practices that could provide effective bargaining among all political actors. It also suggests, that for politics to be the society most effective method of self-correction, the domain of politics should encompass the formal structure as well (Fig 1.3). The study takes issue with essentialist approaches, that assert modern, secular institutions as a fixed point which constitutes the structure of

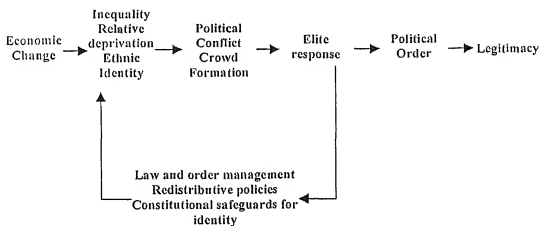


Figure 1.3 : How Political Systems cope with Discontent in terms of the Transactional Model

reference for the evaluation of attitude, and behaviour of individuals, and groups. In contrast, the study suggests that actors, and their agendas should be acknowledged as autonomous, and legitimate in their own right. With an expanded domain of politics, an explanatory model of governmental effectiveness, and accountability should be able to uncover new empirical data about the preferences of the actors, and their perceptions of costs and benefits about possible outcome. An essentialist approach begins and ends with the modern state as its fixed point; the actor oriented approach adopted here, treats both merely as a point of departure. If that

introduces a certain degree of tentativeness to all institutions, then it is necessary price to pay, for in a democracy, the process of accommodation, and changes in the rule of the game are part of the product as well. However, the transactional model ceases to be effective when the interest articulation of various group consist primarily of questioning the rules of the game, because the model is encapsulated in a constitution, that acts as an interface between the attitudes, and behaviour of policy makers, and those responsible for implementation. Hence, the model has to be supplemented with a transcendental approach going beyond 'who gets what, when and how', encompassing the conflicting boundaries of the community and the State, (Fig. 1.4), as it is not possible for a transactional model to accommodate demands of political articulation of communal identity in the absence of an extra-constitutional change.

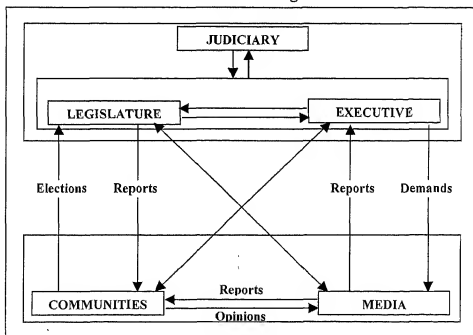


Figure 1.4 : The Transcendental Approach supplementing the Transactional Model

Now, moving on to the explanation for political instability of coalitions in the specific case what emerges here, however,

varies from those generated by various approaches, all taking their cue from the game theory. This theory is based on a highly abstract principle of rational behaviour, which may be more appropriate for analysing economic activity, rather than a complex political situation, which is determined by variety of psychological and sociological factors. Education, tradition, economic development, ideological consensus, political legitimacy, and value orientation, all these constitute the complex matrix from which the political system draws its life, and sustenance. One basic presupposition of the game theory is, that the players are all rational and intelligent, and they play according to the rules of the game. In other words, they not only follow the procedural norms, but also accept the legitimacy of the political system, and respect the formal source of authority, that is, the constitution.¹ However, in India, where the channels of political communication, and process are frequently bypassed, and the methods of mass propaganda, and mass politics are restored to, for the sake of gaining political ascendancy, it is difficult to expect a voter, or legislator to act rationally even in his own interest. In India, the question of coalition being inextricably intertwined with the phenomenon of defection, and unstructured, unprincipled, and highly atomised party-system demands the game theory to be qualified.²

In term of novelty, the interaction of the coalition regimes, and social forces is emphasised in the study. The primary focus of analysis here being neither 'social mobilisation' leading up to the growing demands by social groups in a 'modernising' society, nor class conflict. Rather, the main concern is with the pattern of

1. For detailed exposition see "Game theory and the Study of Coalition Behaviour", Sven Groenning, et al.: *The Study of Coalition Behaviour* (New York, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

2. M.P. Singh: "Models of Coalition Behaviour", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, (Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 April- June, 1977) p. 167. Also see Norman K. Nicholson: "The Factional Model and the Study of Politics", *Comparative Political Studies* (5(3), 1972).

politicisation, that results when the coalition government can influence the life chances of the many social groups, and the coalition arrangement is accessible *via* democratic electoral politics. It will be clear in due course, that the causal and normative implications of this 'holistic' focus vary from those of aforementioned analyses of political coalition.

[C] THE ARGUMENT

The focus of the argument will be mainly on three issues- (i) political stability, (ii) a coherent economic policy, and (iii) the management of the national diversity. To draw out what one can realistically conceptualise from the coalition politics in the Indian context, the argument looks at the evolution of the Indian party system from the standpoint of coalition theory, comparative experience and recent history. The era of 'nineties', full of coalition turbulence makes the question even more pressing.

Here, the first point submitted is, that coalition governments are likely to be more representative of the national diversity. This is relatively obvious, and follows from the very nature of the situation, which dictates an accommodative politics of compromise, and conciliation in which smaller parties, and less powerful interests potentially get a voice in government, and public policy. A greater part of the electorate can get representation in government¹ than has been typical in India, where all Congress majority governments have won a majority of

1. However, it is important to note that the greater representativeness of coalition governments is a qualified one under plurality-rule (first-past-the-post) electoral systems like ours. It is distorted by the seat-vote shares above a certain (varying) threshold got over-represented. The legislature thus, elected reflects this disproportion, i.e., the greater representativeness is primarily with regard to legislature and only distantly to the electorate and society at large.

seats on the basis of only a plurality of votes, the collective majority of votes thus finding themselves underrepresented in government. This can be potentially destabilising in a country of great diversities, if some regions or groups feel un or underrepresented systematically. Prolonged exclusion from the government by such a collective majority, especially from governments given to riding rough shod over the opposition, can give rise to frustration, and agitational politics which make effective governance more difficult.

The second and third points are less obvious, more complexly interrelated, and based on insight derived from theory, comparative experience and recent Indian trends. Basically, there are two broad classes of coalition theory relevant for our purposes at this point of study. The first are power maximisation theories, and the second are policy-based theories of coalition formation and behaviour.¹ Power maximisation theories stress the maximisation of payoffs, that is, power and its derivatives as the key factor in coalition formation, ignoring ideological and policy affinities as factors.

Policy based theories, on the other hand, consider such affinities, the key to the formation of coalitions. Power-maximisation theories, accordingly, predict minimum winning coalitions, defined as a coalition in which each party is indispensable to the coalition's winning a simple majority of seats, because in such coalitions each member's share of the payoff is maximised. This holds, with variations, whether one assumes fixed (government formations), or variable payoffs, proportionality in sharing the payoff, or side payments by

1. For an example of the first sees William H. Riker: *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, (Yale Univ. Press 1962). For the second see Robert Axelrod: *Conflict of Interest: A Theory of Divergent Goals with Applications to Politics*, and Abram De Swan: *Coalition Theory and Cabinet Formation* (Amsterdam; Elsevier Scientific, 1972).

dominant partners, to the degree of perfect or imperfect information.

Policy-based theories predict minimum 'connected' winning coalitions. That is, coalitions that are composed of member parties adjacent on the ideological scale, and at least not incompatible on major issues, thus minimising the ideological range, and within this limiting condition, the minimum number of parties needed for a majority. Empirical evidence from the comparative literature on coalition politics tends to support policy-based theories, and hence the importance of compatibility for coalition formation, and even more for coalition longevity.¹ About two-thirds of majority coalitions in developed countries in the post-war period have been ideologically connected. This is so especially in the most European politics, and in Israel where there are clear ideological, and social divisions, and where parties identified with particular ideological positions, and social constituencies have fairly stable support bases. However, within these constraints, payoff maximisation plays a powerful behavioural role.

Neither set of theories predicts minority governments, minority coalitions, or oversized coalitions (coalitions with redundant partners, not necessary for a majority). However, it has been shown that during 1945-1992 over 35% of governments in Western parliamentary democracies have been minority governments, including over half the governments in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Canada.² And minority governments, not majority coalitions, have been the solution to

1. See Gregory Luebbert: "Coalition Theories and Government formation in Multiparty Democracies", *Comparative Politics*, Jan., 1983.

2. See Kaare Strom : "Minority Governments in Parliamentary Democracies", *Comparative Political Studies*, (July 1994), for the facts and arguments in the following paragraph.

43% of minority situations. Minority governments have been shown to be rational solution from the standpoint of both the party, and parties in the minority (single-party or coalition) government. Meanwhile, those in the opposition in specific situations where the minority government is a near-majority in an ideologically divided opposition, and/or when opposition parties can get their say in policy without assuming governmental responsibility, since the minority government is amenable to pressure.

Similarly, minority coalitions, one-third of all minority governments in the period concerned, are a rational solution if ideological differences militate against external supporters participating in the government (as in India's BJP and Left-supported National Front in 1989-90, Congress supported Mr. Chandra Shekhar's government, and United Front government of Mr. Deve Gowda, and Mr. Gujral in the mid-nineties). Oversized coalitions are a rational solution, when the effectiveness of the policy is enhanced by taking on board redundant parties (not needed for a majority), or when in a plurality-rule electoral system, the seat majority of the dominant partner(s) in an oversized coalition depends on the vote transfer of the supporters of the minor partners, though their seat may not be numerically critical in the legislature elected.¹

Another way of looking at power maximisation and policy based theories is to divide the motivations of the politicians or the political cultures of societies into 'opportunistic' and 'partisan' politics. A society's politics is 'opportunistic' if the

1. For example, while the CPM has got an absolute majority of seats in West Bengal and Tripura and, hence purely technically, there is no minority situation and no need for a coalition. This majority is dependent on the vote transfer of its lesser partners and hence a coalition is necessary if it is to get re-elected.

pursuit of the political office is primarily for the fruits of the office – power and pelf for its own sake. ‘Partisan’ politics on the other hand, is when the pursuit of office is for changing public policy in the direction desired by the contestant party’s ideology and social constituency.¹

Likewise, opportunistic parties, and politicians manipulate policy, when in office, to satisfy the largest possible number of supporters so as to get re-elected. Opportunistic politics tends to prevail in societies without clear party divisions along an ideological scale, such as in India’s centrist Congress dominated party system, where ideological parties such as the left parties, and the BJP have traditionally played a small role. In societies with a clear ideological spectrum such as the typical range from far right, mainstream conservatives, centre, centre-left (socialist/socialist democracies) and left (communist) parties, that prevails in most of the Europe, politics tends to be about public policy, ideology and relatively stable political constituencies, and not just about the fruit of office and getting re-elected.

In a coalition situation, power-maximisation theories of coalition formation, and behaviour would correspond with opportunistic politics, and in turn, with societies without or with, respectively, the kind of clear socio-political, and ideological spectrum that each is associated with. Clearly, the Indian situation corresponds to a particularly corrupt form of opportunistic politics, with all that implies for the likely behaviour of coalitions.

1. For a discussion of these terms in the context of the political business cycle literature, see Alberto Alesina: “Political Models of Macroeconomic Policy and Fiscal Reforms”, in Stephan Haggard and Steven Webb (eds.): *Voting for Reforms* (New York, OUP, 1994).

Two more points needed to be elaborated before discussing the behaviour of coalitions in India. First, a reality absolutely critical to coalition behaviour, stability and longevity is that any coalition is at best a second-best situation for every political party. Every political party during the coalition's life time will seek to position itself to improve its vote, and seat share in the next election. Thus conflict is built into both coalition situations, and minority governments. Every one is seen jockeying among its partners for long-term electoral gains, along with short-term maximisation of power, and its fruits.

Second, an equally critical difference both for the likelihood as well as the behavioural characteristics of coalition governments is the different implications of proportional representation, and plurality-rule electoral system. In the former system, parties get seats in proportion to their votes. These system, like in most of continental Europe, Scandinavia and Israel, tend to throw up coalition governments, since no party gets half the votes necessary for half the seats. These coalitions at least tend to be fairly stable. This is partly because despite the inevitable jockeying for increased vote share in the next election, the partner parties need not fear, that a swing will dramatically reduce their seat strength due to the proportionality rule, and the improbability of huge swings.

However, the implication of the plurality-rule electoral system is quite different. In these, due to the seat-vote disproportion, a plurality suffices for a legislative majority, and hence coalitions tend to be rare. This is a common-place observation. What we need to note is the further implication for political behaviour in the event of a coalition. Here, the dynamic is quite different. While there will be the inevitable competition for long-term electoral gains (increased vote share), as well as

short term power maximisation, competition and suspicion among the coalition partners is likely to be much more intense, because a small swing in popular support can hugely increase, or alternatively decimate a party in terms of seats. This would mean potentially either putting it in power on its own, or destroying any chance of it being in the government.

In such a situation, coalitions, and minority government, tend to be unstable, with strong incentives for the partners or external supporters who perceive themselves to be losing out to terminate the arrangement, and to be rapacious in maximising their immediate gains from office, or constantly blackmail the government about withdrawal of support. Thus, the instability, and short lives of coalitions in plurality-rule systems is due to a 'structural characteristics' built in such systems themselves.

Looking at India in the light of above theorising logic, the study derive its second and third points of argument. Coalition and minority governments in 1990s have been notoriously unstable, and short-sighted, and contrary to the optimistic view, unlikely to overcome these shortcomings with experience, and learn to work together. The record at the Centre and in the states confirms this argument.¹ Coalitions have typically been seen as stopgap arrangements until such time, as defections, or split followed by mergers can be induced so as to get a majority. This

1. The record at Centre is well-known. That in the states is not essentially different. From 1987-99 of the 54 minority situation that arose in the state assemblies, significantly only 21 arose as a result of elections, while as many as 33 arose due to party-splits or defections. Out of 54, no coalition or minority government could be cobbled together in 15, leading assembly-dissolution and fresh elections. As many as 9 were resolved by engineering defections to achieve a majority coalitions at the outset. 16 coalitions and 12 minority governments, including minority coalitions were the solution in the remaining 28 minority situations. However, only 7 lasted their full term, out of which 4 were ideologically connected policy-based left-front coalitions. The remaining 19 either collapsed ahead to term and ended up under presidents rule, and eventually, fresh elections, or got transformed in majority government by the device of defections, or by splits followed by mergers of splinters groups with the ruling party or parties.

is because party identification is so weak both among politicians, and voters and, because parties lack well-defined social-bases. This is all more the case in the post-1989 period of considerable electoral volatility with seismic shifts in the formerly stable single-dominant party system.

The instability, and short life of coalitions can also be traced to the legacy of centrist politics dominated by an umbrella Congress party, and the absence of clear ideological divide between major parties, except those at the ends of the spectrum. This removes ideological, and policy barriers to defections, splits and mergers, topped with the dominance of opportunistic politics, and ubiquity of corruption. Events in Gujarat in 1995 have demonstrated, for example, that even supposedly disciplined ideological parties like the BJP became increasingly prone to opportunistic politics.

Lastly, as for the impact of coalition and/or minority governments on coherent public policy, especially economic policy, and particularly, continued structural adjustment towards an efficient, internationally competitive economy, the implications are clear. A high degree of suspicion of coalition partners/external supporters, expectations of a short-lived governments, and general uncertainty contributes to the shortening of time-horizons, and incentive for short-term maximisation. These are not conducive to the undertaking of a long-term policy perspective needed for coherent economic, and social policies of the kind that constitute part of an economic reform programme. This is because structural adjustment strategies followed during the 1990s did have a cost-benefit structure, in which the costs tended to be up-front, assured and concentrated on relatively organised interests. This had potential to flare agitational politics, while the benefits, if the programme

worked, would have been deferred, uncertain and diffused over society as a whole, rather than clearly concentrated on certain groups. All this made it difficult to muster a supportive coalition of interests for such a programme.

For a coalition government to undertake an economic, and social policy package that has short-term political costs, but only long-term gains will be very difficult, if not impossible, that can be conceivably be undertaken in the post-election 'honeymoon' period, when no one wants a fresh election. However, with the impending advent of state assembly elections somewhere or other during a parliamentary term, competition will intensify not only between the government and the opposition, but even among coalition partners, or between governing and the external supporting parties. This then, tends to push policy not only towards paralysis, incoherence and ad-hoc manners, but even to fiscally irresponsible competitive populism, or to competitive militancy/communalism of various stripes.

Further, it has been argued in the study that there are certain self-correcting mechanisms of Indian democracy at work, which underline India's resilience that pulled the country from the brink of fall. By self-correction, we mean that the system punishes, politicians or political parties, that go to an political excess, violating democratic norms flagrantly, or pushing the system to ideological extremes of right or left. In other words, political and ideological excesses are checked; routine political misconduct, on the whole is not.¹ In all, there are three mechanisms, two of them - (i) electoral and (ii) non-electoral can be called institutional, by which it is meant that they stem

1. This, same may argue, is precisely the problem in Indian Politics. Change is never dramatic, and routine politics always returns overtime. One may not like routine politics, but it would surely be difficult to argue that catastrophe is 'intrinsically' superior to normalcy.

from how the polity is designed. Electoral mechanisms refer to the basic properties of the voting system. The non-electoral mechanism point to institutions such as courts. A third mechanism is identity-based, and can be called cultural, as it results from how Indian society is structured.

On the electoral plane, political extremism has had a direct confrontation with three well-known constraints of Indian democracy—region, caste and alliances, which led to remarkable changes in its agenda, whereas non-electoral institutional mechanisms, armed constitutionally with the power of oversight over the politician's conduct, checked political excesses. Take for examples of Judicial Activism and of the Election Commission regulating election expenditures. These second set of mechanisms can be called institutional diversity, and institutional uncertainty, as it is not easy for any party or government to 'rig' so many institutions at same time: the state governments, the Governor, Parliament, the judiciary the Election Commission, but since one cannot *ex-ante* predict how human beings, once invested with power, will behave – submissively or independently – institutional uncertainty also constrains. Finally, turning to cultural mechanisms, scholarship on ethnic conflict suggests an important distinction between dispersed, and centrally-focused ethnic configuration.¹ In India, all ethnic cleavages except one (to which we shall come in a moment) one regionally, or locally specific, whether it is tribal unrest in the North-East, or a sons of the soil movement in Assam, Maharashtra or Hyderabad. Even the caste system, so

1. Donald Horowitz: *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, Univ. of California, 1985). Dispersed systems have locally or regionally specific identities and there are many such identities; the centrally focused systems have fewer salient identities, that moreover, cut across the entire length and breadth of the country. In the former, ethnic conflicts remain localised, while in the latter, due to ubiquity of cleavage, conflicts tend to escalate.

intrinsic to Hindu society, is locally or regionally based: anti-Brahmin caste riots in the South did not extend to the North. There is no nation-wide linguistic identity either. So, dispersion of cleavages means that parties emphasising only one cleavage can win power in states. But to come to power in Delhi, politicians must build bridges and coalitions across cleavages. There is only one cleavage in India that has, in theory, the potential of turning India from a dispersed to a centrally focused system-the Hindu-Muslim one, which the BJP sought to do through its Ayodhya agitation, but it failed for reasons embedded in the cultural regulatory mechanism. Firstly, there is sufficient mobilisation of people by competing elites on alternative identities, cleavages and issues, so much so that country's multicultural diversity cannot easily be painted on a Hindu-Muslim axis. Secondly, how to press its case about national identity without touching off violence remained a fundamental problem for the BJP, and thirdly, Muslims all over India didn't feel equally strongly about the symbol, that was attacked. Malayali Muslim politicians, for example, opposing both the BJP and Communists, and collaborated with Congress, in their interests, which led to a split between Kerala Muslim League.

The argument, therefore, developed here in the study stresses multi-causality. It is also largely inductive, derived from empirical materials. An analysis that would emphasis one set of variables over others, and would not allow sharp "differentiation of the intellectual product", simply could not be sustained against the complex empirical findings. A number of related, but ultimately independent forces influenced recent political changes in India.

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[D]
**CONSIDERATIONS OF THE CONCEPTUAL AND
THEORETICAL ISSUES**

Since any analysis must begin by defining concepts, and specifying the prior theoretical inclinations, this section will define some core concepts of this analysis, and outline the orientation that underlies the study. It is argued that many of the explanations commonly offered for "problems of coalition governance" in the developed countries, pertaining both to the rational choice theory¹ and the irrational behavioural model² are too socio-centric. In a country in which the government sets the agenda for socio-economic changes, and in which extensive governmental intervention is an integral part of the changing political-economy, understanding the role, and nature of government is crucial for the analysis of patterns of political change. This emphasis ought not to lead to an *a priori* neglect of socio-economic forces. Rather, it means that both political and social forces need to be taken into account. Therefore, the

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1. The theory was first elaborated, though no restricted to coalitions, in John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern: *The Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1994). Recent works include: – G. Tsebelis: *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1990); Jeffrey Banks: *Signalling Games in Political Science* (Chur, London, Harwood, 1991); Avinash Dixit and Barry Nalebuff: *Thinking Strategically-The Competitive Edge in Business Politics and Everyday Life* (New York, Norton, 1991); P. Ordeshook: *A Political Theory Primer* (London, Routledge, 1992); S. J. Brahm: *Theory of Moves* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).
 2. This model is identified as that initiated by J. M. Buchanan: "The pure theory of government finance: a suggested approach", *Journal of Political Economy*, (57, 1949), 496–505; "A difficulty in the concept of social welfare", *Journal of Political Economy*, (58, 1950); 328–46; and P. Samuelson: "The pure model of public expenditure", *Review of Economic and Statistics*, (36, 1954), 387–9. For recent works see: D. P. Green and I. Shapiro: *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: a Critique of Applications in Political Science*, (New Haven CT, Yale Univ. Press, 1994); Hugh Stratton and Lionel Orchard: *Public Goods, Public Enterprises, Public Choice: Theoretical Foundations of the Contemporary Attack of Government* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994).

theoretical stance that informs this study continually emphasises the interaction of variables from both domains.

The concept of "coalition" used in this study by the contextual expediency precludes the usage of the game theoretic definition¹ of coalition, literally. It is, instead, used in a qualified and specific sense. The concept of coalition in context of aforementioned, transactional model is regarded here as the product of politics in a parliamentary democracy, and particularly, of the exigencies of a competitive multi-party system, creating a situation in which government's functional direction is reaching crossroads. It is a phenomenon, where more than two political parties come together to form a government, sinking even their basic ideological differences in the event of the inability of any single party to command a workable majority in the lower house of the legislature. Further, built into the concept of coalition as used here is an assumption, that it tends to depart, at least in details from the well-established norms of what is popularly termed as 'Westminster Model'², which is characterised by nominal and real heads, strong cabinets, collective ministerial responsibility, opposition accountability, stable government, effective control on administration, influential leadership, neutral civil services, etc.

1. The ideas behind the game theory are basically those of zero-sum games, where the power to govern is generally taken to be a cake of fixed size, so that the coalition bargaining game is zero-sum. Accordingly, in three-persons or large games, the problem of each player is to select partners who can collectively win. The concept has assumed a high degree of mathematical systematisation, providing a model for the study of decision-making in legislatures, committees, cabinets and international organisations. For elaborate detail, see, "Coalition Formation", *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. II, pp. 519-65.

2. See S. A. De Smith, "Westminster Exports Models: The Legal Framework of Responsible Government", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, Nov. 1961), p. 3.

The concept of "governance" directs attention to a government's capacity to govern. For the Indian situation of the 1990s, the issue of governance will refer to three types of connotations: (1) the nature of formal political structure, (2) the orientation of the policy; and (3) the efficiency to accommodate political interest, and conflicts within political order¹. As such, a government whose power rests on fluctuating governing structures (i.e. coalitions), and whose leaders repeatedly fail to fulfil their stated goals, and to control the politically directed articulation will be deemed to a government with a low capacity to govern.

In a democratic polity, the issue of the nature of formal political structure implies the endurance of coalitions, referring mainly to the stability of social support, that competing parties may or may not enjoy. A fluctuating social base often means fluctuating party membership and low levels of identification between parties and supporters. Such parties are likely to be weak organisationally, without clear and coherent programmes². If all or most of the parties in a polity display these characteristics, the government led by such competing parties probably will be vulnerable to wide swings in public opinions, and to populist tendencies. Leaders with considerable personal appeal tend to emerge in such settings. The absence of enduring coalitions, thus, becomes one good summary indication of structural atrophy in a domestic setting.

The issue of the policy-orientation, and effectiveness can be comprehended in either more or less demanding terms. One

1. For a more general discussion, see R. Mayntz, "Governing failures and the problems of governability" in J. Kooiman (ed.): *Modern Governance* (London, Sage, 1993), pp. 9-20.

2. N. Luhmann: *The Differentiation of Society* (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1982) p. XV.

conceivably could set up standards whereby some objective definition of societal problems would be sought, and against which the capacity of a government to solve problem would be assessed. Chances are that most governments would come short in such an exercise. The more modest standard of policy effectiveness adopted here, thus, is to judge a government performance on issues that government itself defines as areas of priority.¹ A government that repeatedly fails to accomplish its stated goals is likely to be a government that doesn't govern well.

The last, and the most obvious indicator of problematic governance is the pursuit of political goals outside the gamut of formal political order, either by the government, or by the people. The absence of open discontent, especially in non-democratic settings, doesn't necessarily indicate a government that governs well, but an increase in politically-oriented dissent, and discontent unregulated in a more, or less open polity, nearly always indicates a growing political crisis. It indicates that the government doesn't possess the mechanisms necessary for amicable resolution of the society's normal political demands.

The third slippery concept that the study applies, is that of fractionalised mandate. This study will use the political definition of "fractionalisation" developed by Lassoka and Taagepera: indicates a degree to which a electoral turnover hegemonised in favour of one or a few parties, in variance to being greater equally shared among more parties.² "Fractionalised mandate" then, refers high volatility, that bespeaks a complex, and unstable bargaining environment for both parties and electorates.

1. D. Osborne and T. Gaebler: *Rethinking Government* (Reading MA, Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 34.

2. R. Taagepera and M. Shugart: *Seats and Votes: The Effects of Electoral Systems* (Yale University Press, 1989).

Because the concept of “fractionalised mandate” refers to a process whereby the electorate’s interests remain non-aggregated on the scale of political priority, involving high risk gamble as a means of value and stability, it is both essential and fraught with analytical pitfalls for the study of coalition governance. The greater danger is that problems of coalition disorders will be simply redefined as problems of fractionalised mandate, in the belief that something has been explained. In order to minimise this problem of “explanation by redefinition”, we have attempted to follow two principles of analysis throughout this study. First, fractionalisation, and its opposite, non-fractionalisation are both descriptions of conditions over time, that requires explanation, rather than serving as explanations for the problems of coalition governance. Second, fractionalisation is not a generalised political process, but a process that applies to specific electoral systems, and procedures.

POLITICAL CHANGE : RECONFIGURATIVE PATTERNS AND THE NEW SETTING OF COALITION POLITICS

There has been a persisting concern among scholarly observers of India about the 'survival' of Indian democracy.¹ They see the increasing factionalism within political parties, the growing regionalism, casteism and communalism of political processes, the pervasive cynicism about the possibility of establishing, and sustaining impersonal institutions, because of the patronage culture, which surrounds the institutions, the increasing criminalisation of politics, and the general decline of the law and order as expression of this crisis of Indian democracy.¹ While these empirical observations about the new political landscape are valid, and they are certainly a cause for concern, they do not, in themselves, lead to a pessimistic conclusion, so often voiced, that India's democracy is under

1. Implicit in this anxiety is the presence of a model of democracy in contrast to which the India experience is being measured and found to still 'qualify'. The problems of Indian democracy are seen as substantial, as constituting a basic challenge to its survival, as if India does not or has not developed the fundamentals of democracy to meet this challenge. Problems of democracy in Europe and the US, in contrast, would be seen as mere lapses, occasional deviations, which do not threaten the very fabric of democracy in those polities since the fundamentals there are deeply entrenched in the collective political culture. This exhibits both an ethnocentrism and a lack of vigorous scholarship. The glaring instance of this check list method is A. Lijphart : "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation", *American Political Science Review* (Vol. 90, No.2, June, 1996.), pp.258-268. Lijphart tries to fit India into his model of consociational democracy, i.e., it must exhibit the following four features : (i) Grand coalition governments which include representatives of all major linguistic and religious groups, (ii) cultural autonomy for these groups, (iii) proportionality in political representation and civil services' appointments, and (iv) in minority veto with regard for vital minority rights and autonomy. His intention is clear. By showing that India fits the model, he is able to salvage his model, since he recognises that the 'Indian puzzle' is even more troublesome for consociational (power sharing) theory of political change.

serious threat. One could, in fact, counter this catalogue of failures with a catalogue of successes, such as the existence of a free press, regular elections, orderly succession, freedom of movement, association and protest, a broadened leadership base, and an inclusive political system demonstrated by its high level of electoral participation,² as instances of India's success as a democracy.

. So the fact is that the perspective, one adopts influences the way in which one views the terrain ; that the proper perspective, in fact enables one to see more and to see differently, and that, in this case, the perspective itself which is a major source of anxiety about the 'survival' of Indian democracy. Adopting a proper perspective is, hence, an important precondition to understanding the political change in India.

Two important features should be briefly dwelled on that one must bear in mind, when viewing the recent political change in India. The first concern 'scale', which covers not just population and territory, but also cultural diversity. India is not just a 'nation-state', but a 'civilisation state',³ a term, which

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1. Mitra, S.K. : 'Crowds and Power- "Democracy and the crises of 'Governability' in India', in Upendra Baxi and B. Parekh (eds.) *Crises and Changes in Contemporary India* : (Sage, N. Delhi).
 2. This is true both in terms of percentage of the total electorate and in terms of the numbers of groups that are participating higher in fact than in many of the so-called 'mature democracies'. Jack Lively : "In the centripetal system", *Times Literary Supplement* (5-11, Jan., 1989)-(Review of R. A. Dahl : *Democracy and its Critics*).
 3. The idea of India being a 'civilisation state' has been suggested by Ravinder Kumar. "There is no reason why the nation of India as a civilisation state rather than a nation state could call for any prescriptive underpinnings of the political system devised by the Constitution. Such an overarching identity provides the liberal space necessary for the articulation of diverse identities within a single political system.... at the same time, our redefinition carries the moral concerns and the social agenda which the liberal state had acquired for itself in the era of welfare politics". Kumar, Ravinder : "State Formation in India : Retrospect and Prospect", paper presented at the IDPAD seminar on *State and Society : Changing Relations between State and Society in India and Towards an Emerging European State*, New Delhi, (5-9 March, 1990), p.7.

encapsulates both the defining features of contemporary India: its unity and its diversity. We have introduced the idea of 'scale' to indicate the number, and range of political agents, who have been enfranchised by the new constitutional order. They represent each of the significant dimensions around which individuals, and groups are constituted in society, such as language, religion, region, caste, class, etc. The aspect of 'scale' in India refers not just to the range of the polity, but, also its magnitude in absolute terms. If the topography of a hierarchical society is overlaid on this aspect of scale, the terrain gets more complicated. Further, if we then introduce the dynamics represented by the principle of equality on this static picture, we discover a scenario where powerful forces of struggle, and social transformation are taking place.

The trajectory of recent political change in Indian democracy, hence, sets into motion a struggle of *rationalities*, between the region and the nation, between the short-term and long-term, between the segmental and the universal¹. This struggle of *rationalities* is to evolve common rules for the political community, to determine its contours, and its terms of interaction. While, the roots of this struggle can be traced to the colonial period, in that the contest between the universalising basis of the institutions of colonial period, and the particularistic loyalties of segments of Indian society had already begun; it is mainly after Independence, with the expansion of political socialisation, that this struggle has acquired a different tenor,

1. It follows that as a number of persons in the aggregate increases, knowledge of what the common interest or the general good might be in specific situations must necessarily depend less and less on one's own direct experience and more and more on images and abstraction What is more, as cleavages develop and political conflict appear, differences between the general good and the perceived interests of oneself or one's groups become an increasingly common feature of political life. Dahl, R. A. : " The Problem of Civic Competence ", *Journal of Democracy*, (Oct., 1992), p.46.

and a more ambitious scale. Within this terrain today, there are several groups jostling for a fair share of social resources, competing to make their political agenda the common agenda. The historical struggle currently underway is between these two principles of ordering a society. On the one side is the older 'principle of hierarchy' which has a pervasive presence in all dimensions of Indian society, from belief system to economy, and on the other side is the newer 'principle of equality' which is also asserting itself within all these dimensions. The politics of contemporary India is an expression of this struggle.

Now, to examine the dynamics of this struggle, we shall look at three aspects of the new political landscape, i.e., systemic, procedural and psephological. First, the *Systemic Aspect* will analyse new political matrices of Indian party system in its interface with the coalition politics in the 1990s. Second, the *Procedural Aspect* will undertake the analysis and evaluation of the electoral process from the viewpoint of the various modalities of electoral mobilisation, and the structure of competition. And thirdly, the *Psephological Aspect* looks critically at voting behaviour and the meaning of verdict qualitatively, as well as quantitatively, with the aim of comprehending the connotation of the 'fractionalised mandate' (in its full proportions) of the 1990s.

(A)
THE 'SYSTEMIC' RECONFIGURATION OF
THE NINETIES : NEW MATRICES OF
INDIAN PARTY SYSTEM

The party system in India has varied from time to time. In the beginning, it was one party dominant system, briefly, a two party system, and subsequently, a multi-party system moving towards chaos, with no semblance of a 'system'. From the focal point of the study, this has been marked by a visible shift from

centrist preponderance to polarised pluralism. Now, this has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last decade. In attempting to make sense of this transformation, the analysis delineates the major trends in the party system in the period under study, empirically details them, and relates these developments to the theoretical literature on the determinants of the party systems.

To start, a quick outline of major trends in the party system in the last decade must include the following developments:

1. The single-most important has been the decline of the Congress, for long the inevitable nodal reference point of both political, and theoretical reflection on Indian politics. It is true that the Congress has in, purely electoral terms, shown that it is capable of rebounding successfully—witness the result of a number of Assembly elections in '98 – '99. But, definitely, it has been dislodged from the position of the Centre around which all political calculations must of necessity revolve.

2. The trend towards federalisation of the party system, a trend already strong in the 1980s, has been substantially deepened. It made its presence felt at the Centre for the first time with the National Front Government in 1989, and has become a trend that shows every sign of enduring. Consequently, despite coalition and/or minority governments, and related cabinet instability at the Centre, the state-level has seen the maturing of bipolar party systems in a majority of states.

3. This decade saw a sharp rise in political mobilisation on the basis of social cleavage based on ascriptive identities, in particular of caste and religion.

4. Central to parliamentary government is the process of government formation, and the constitution of the cabinet. In this decade, this process resulted in variously, majority coalition, minority coalition, and single-party minority governments. In addition, by rational anticipation of the verdict of a hung parliament, a number of parties have veered towards what can well be labelled as "alliance culture". Alliances have become part of the accepted rules of the game, rather than something to be restored to in exceptional moments.

Now details empirical facts about the party system in 1989-99 period can be put to examine whether these patterns can be stalled into an analytically coherent framework. Since explanation, and description can hardly be separated, it is best to make clear what theoretical issues, the description is meant to foreground.

The issues are two. The first is the influence of institutional variables in shaping the evolution of the party system. There are two institutions, that need to be considered. The electoral system, and the federal character of the state. Both of them need to be considered jointly because, in ways to be spelled out, it is not each in isolation, but both working in conjunction, that produces their cumulative effect: a party system, which produces coalition and/or minority governments at the national level, but at the state-level yields two-party, or more generally, bipolar systems. The second issue relates to the role of social cleavages, or more precisely, how these cleavages are 'particised' through the dynamic of party competition. The trajectory of the party system in India, arguably, can best be made sense of, in terms of these two factors. But, for now it is necessary to move to the empirical details.

A particularly interesting trend in this decade is the emergence of a bifurcated, or two level patterns in the party system in which the state pattern is significantly different from the national pattern. The following provides evidence for this claim.

At the national level, the first five general elections, 1952 to 1971 gave rise to a one-party dominance system in which Congress received over 40% of the vote. With the important exception of the 1967 elections, the pattern in the states was not dissimilar to that at the Centre, replicating the pattern of Congress dominance. By contrast, the period from 1977 to the 1999 elections shows a pattern of growing competitiveness in the party system (again, with one exception: the 1984 election, held in the shadow of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination, which resulted in a large victory margin for the Congress). The vote margin between the first and second parties tended to decrease.

In particular, general elections from 1989 onwards, reveal an unambiguous trend of Congress decline, accompanied by the rise of two other formations: the BJP and its allies, and a coalition-centred around the Janta Dal. In 1989, a minority coalition led by the National Front assumed office. Its main component was the Janta Dal, with outside support from the BJP and Left Front. The 1991 general elections brought to power a minority Congress government, which during the course of its term transformed itself into majority status by carefully orchestrated defections.

In 1996, a thirteen-party coalition, christened the United Front, formed the government with external support from both the Congress and the Left Front. Finally, the elections of 1998 and 1999 resulted in coalition government led by the BJP, with number of the partners being strongly anchored regional parties.

Government formation at the national level thus, revealed definite move from one-party majority rule; multi-party coalitions and/or minority government seems here to stay.

However, the state-level tells a significantly different story. The pattern revealed by the state assembly elections results is as follows :

1. In a number of states, the decline of Congress was caused by the growth of one other party, resulting a two-party system, in which, both Congress, and the other party have been able to form government on their own. This is the case in M.P., Rajasthan, H.P., Gujarat, A.P., Orissa and Assam.

2. Yet another set of states reveal a pattern, that is not quite a two-party system, but analogous to it, in the sense, that there exist two poles in the party system, with one or more parties clustered at each pole. This bipolar pattern¹ occurs in Maharashtra, Harayana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura. The last named three states have evolved a stable bipolar system comprising of a Left Front coalition opposed by a Congress or Congress-led coalition. Some change in this pattern has occurred in Bengal by the breaking away of Ms. Mamta Banerjee's Trinamul Congress from the Congress, and her subsequent aligning at the national level with the BJP; but the consequent weakening of the Congress has left the party system in the state essentially unaltered, as a bipolar structure.

3. A multi-party system, without a clear bipolar party system exists in U.P., Karnataka and Bihar. However, in 1999 general election, the Janta Dal has been seriously decimated in

1. Cf. E. Sridharan, op. cit.: "Duverger's law', its Reformulation and the Evolution of the Indian Party system", *IRIS India Working Paper* (No. 35), IRIS, University of Maryland, 1998.

Karnataka, and the two party patterns seems to be established there as well.

The upshot of the above empirical patterns is that till the late '60s/early '70s, there existed a one-party dominant system in which a dominant party Congress, overwhelmed a fragmented opposition at the state-level in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. The only exception to this in a limited number of states was the 1967 election. This pattern has now disappeared in all states, for both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. It is reasonable to conclude that, leaving aside some important exceptions, the state-level party system has evolved towards either a straight forward two-party system, or a multi-party system which is bipolar in terms of the pattern of party competition¹.

At the national level, there is no visible tendency towards a two-party system. Rather, what has emerged is a multi-party system with three loose alliance structures, and a number of small parties, that stand independent of these. This was only to be expected, because the state-level is characterised by a multiplicity of bipolarities. In one set of states it is Congress vs. BJP and allies, in another set, it is Congress vs. Left parties; while a Congress vs. regional party pattern prevails in Punjab, Haryana, A.P., Assam and the North-Eastern states (except Tripura where it is Congress vs. Left)

The literature on the determinants of party-systems offers a number of contending theories, which helps to make sense of the above patterns. They may be classified under two broad

1. Yogendra Yadav : "Reconfiguration in Indian Politics : State Assembly Election 1993-95", *EPW* (31(2-3), 1996), pp. 95-104.

heads. Theories that relate party systems to institutions,¹ and theories that relate to social cleavages². Among the former, most attention has been devoted to the effects of one particular institution, viz., the electoral laws in place in the country concerned. However, a second institutional feature, the federal structure of the state, while it has received much less analytical attention, is more significant in the Indian context.

Duverger's law asserts a strong connection between the type of electoral laws and the party system prevalent in a polity³. The claim is that single-member district simple plurality (SMSP) electoral systems favour two-party systems. Conversely, proportional representation (PR) systems encourage multi-partyism.

This is at best only an inductive generalisation in need of an explanation, which would anchor it in the purposive behaviour of voters and candidates. Subsequent research has pointed to such explanatory mechanisms, whose joint operation is thought to underpin this law: strategic entry by party/candidates, which tends to reduce the number of candidates, who actually enter to two (given the expectation of failure of third parties); and strategic voting by the electorate, which reduces the number of candidates to two, in case more than two have entered the race.

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1. See, perhaps most notably : A. Lijphart : *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977) ; *Electoral Systems and Party Systems : a Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994); D. Rae : *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971); R. Taagepera and M. Shugart : *Seats and Votes* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989).
 2. S.M. Lipset, and S. Rokkhan (eds.) : *Party Systems and Voters Alignments: Cross - National Perspective* (New York, Free, 1967); Bartolini and Mair : "Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability"; O. Krutsen and E. Scarbrough : "Cleavage Politics", in J. Van Deth and E. Scarbrough (eds) : *The Impact of Values* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 492-523.
 3. Cf. Maurice Duverger : *Political Parties* (Wiley, New York, 1954).

Vis-à-vis India, Duverger's law raises questions, as to the reason for the existence of a multi-party system at the national level, despite a simple plurality electoral system. The key lies in recognising, that the law essentially operates only at the level of the electoral district.¹ Starting out from this level, the overall number of parties in a polity will be decided by the linkages effected between three levels : district, state and national. Under some conditions, linkages will be successfully effected across all three levels, thus leading to a national two party system. Other circumstances may produce a different equilibrium, where aggregation stops short of the national level. In the Indian case, the question can be reformulated as: what is the character of the linkage process, that results in a bifurcated party system? This is where federalism, the second institutional feature, needs to be introduced to complete the explanation.

Intuitively, it is not hard to see that the 'political opportunity structure'² offered by the federal nature of the Indian State, provides strong incentives for ambitious politicians to set up new parties at the province level of aggregations, or to establish powerful regional branches of national parties, in both case leading to an effective federalisation of the party-system. In fact, there exist both-office-seeking and policy-seeking attractions for politicians at the state-level. Most policies in India including especially the key domains of agricultural policy and job reservation policy, is both constitutionally assigned to the state assemblies, and/or their effective implementation is controlled at the state-level (e.g. land reforms).

1. Gary Cox : *Making Votes Count* (Cambridge University Press, New York,, 1997).

2. The term comes from Joseph Schlesinger : *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991).

As for the office-seeking motives, the chances of capturing positions of at the Centre are far more remote compared to the opportunity of state-level office. While empirical evidence of this has yet to be systematically collected, it is reasonable to hypothesise, that a regional politician would find it far easier to cobble together a support coalition with the promise, to be plausibly encashed in the short-to-medium run, of the distribution as spoils of the offices of the many parastatal enterprises and organisations under state control, appointment power, which comes with occupying governmental power.

As for the demand side of the political equation, not much is required in terms of ideological originality on the part of these leaders, in so far as they can tap an available vein of regional development-cum-cultural sentiment in the electorate. Diverse instances of this logic at the work includes the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) — parties which by their very name announce their regional bases. What is equally interesting, however, is the effective regionalisation of parties with an avowedly national perspective, viz, the Samajwadi Party (SP), confined to U.P. and to a small extent Maharashtra, the Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) to Bihar, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to U.P. The CPI(M) has become regionalised in the state of Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal, while suffering an almost total elimination from the Hindi heartland, even in constituencies where it once had an strong electoral record, such as Kanpur.

The above account on institutional influences is incomplete, because little has been said regarding the substantive reasons for the discontent, which prompted both voters and ambitious politicians to abandon the Congress, and move towards other parties, either strengthening pre-existing

ones, or floating new parties altogether. This is where social cleavages enter. It has been widely commented, that a number of cleavages have been 'particised' in the 1990s. The two most prominent form this has taken, are the growth of the Hindutva movement, and caste-based mobilisation in at least two distinct forms (OBC-based and SC/ST-based).

One finds two distinct types of theories on offer in the literature on social cleavages. The first originated in a very influential volume edited by Lipset and Rokkan.¹ The link between social cleavages and party systems were seen as emerging from the national and industrial revolutions that characterised Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. This argument relied on a form of sociological determinism, whereby parties are influenced by social change, but not the other way round. What the Lipset and Rokkan conceptualisation leaves out of consideration is the role of politicians as entrepreneurs, who actively exploit the lines of divisions in a society.

Precisely this aspect is the strength of an alternative account of cleavages offered by E.E. Schattschneider in *The Semisovereign People*. This book rejects the view that, because there are a variety of cleavages within society, parties must necessarily arise to reflect those cleavages, and the resulting party system will be simply a reflection of these social divisions. Instead, Schattschneider argues that among the many divisions within a society only some will become dominant and form the focus of division between parties. Other cleavages become overridden and largely irrelevant to political competition. Party political entrepreneurs try to define politicised cleavages in such

1. S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, : *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (Free Press, New York, 1967).

a way as to build up a coalition that will best give them access to power.¹

What resonates about this perspective vis-à-vis Indian politics in the post-Congress dominance years is the denial of any natural order of conflicts in a society, which must necessarily be reflected in a party system. Rather, it is ambitious political leaders, who impose that order themselves through their effort to develop cleavages that will advantage them. To quote Schattschneider :

“.....to understand the nature of party conflict it is necessary to consider the function of the cleavages exploited by the parties in their struggle for supremacy. Since the development of the cleavages is a prime instrument of power, the party which is able to make its definition of the issues prevail is likely to take over the government.”²

This seems a prescient description of, for instance, the so-called Mandal vs. Mandir struggle, that erupted in 1990 between the votaries of reservation for OBCs, and the BJP, and which has been a defining feature of this decade of politics in diverse ways since.

A normative worry about the role of social cleavages in politics that deserves to be addressed is, whether such politics may lead to a hardening of ascriptive identities, and generally a decline in the quality of civil society. It is true that a threat to democracy arises if some group is converted into a ‘permanent’

1. One implication flowing from the above characterisation is that any equilibrium achieved by a party system will always be subject to the possibility of disequilibrium. Specifically, this disequilibrium is not of the type attributable to long-run-changes-in, say, the state of economy –but to more short-run factors directly traceable to the mobilising and cleavage development activity undertaken by party-political entrepreneurs.

2. E.E. Schattschneider : *The Semisovereign People* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960), p.63.

majority, which cannot conceivably be overturned; this undermines democracy as it offers no option for excluded groups, but to seek recourse to extremist measures. But this does not appear to be the direction in which Indian politics is moving. This can be exemplified by the situation in U.P., which has witnessed the most intensely divisive forms of cleavage politics in this decade.

In U.P., none of the three major contenders – the BJP, the Samajwadi Part (SP), and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), by itself has the strength to build a sustained majority. The logic of numbers inherent in electoral democracy exerts a 'centripetal effect', whereby each party is forced to appeal to groups not previously part of its core constituency. The net result is that no group is permanently excluded from partisan support coalitions. Backward castes are perhaps in the best situation, being appealed to by all three parties. Scheduled castes, who form the core base of the BSP, find themselves in addition being wooed by the BJP and whatever is left of the Congress. Upper castes groups, who in general have moved over to the BJP, are also targeted by the SP and (to much lesser extent) the BSP. Mobilisation of Muslims is attempted by both SP and BSP, and marginally by BJP as well in closing years of this decade.

A final point on the pattern of social cleavages in India is the relative weakness of cleavage development on explicitly economic lines. The oddity of this in one of the most economically unequal countries in the world deserves attention. A major reason is the absence of permanent consolidated organisations based on the organisation of productive life. It is not as if such organisations were never mooted, as a possibility in Indian party-political history, even leaving aside the

communist parties. The historian D.A. Low¹ provides a careful reconstruction of a remarkable moment in history, in 1936–1937, when the Congress party was faced with a proposal initiated by its left-wing to grant functional representation to workers and peasants as economic categories within the body of the Congress. The proposal was defeated. It is interesting to speculate whether the later pattern of cleavage mobilisations in post-1947 India might have been infused with more explicit economic-class content had this moment yielded a different choice.

Finally, “No hasty conclusion, please” — this message needs to be driven home to those who tended to put a definitive interpretation on isolated political developments in the recent past.² The political scene will continue to be – messy, there being no chance of a basic shift for the foreseeable future. Both the seeming polarisation on the occasion of the elections and the recent disturbance of the poll-time equations are to be ascribed to tactical adjustments made under pressure of short-term compulsions. Political processes in India are nowhere near a stage where one could be optimistic about polarisation, and there is no early prospect of a reversal of polity’s fragmentation. In general, the nature of party system remains a yet non-

1. D.A. Low : “Congress and Mass Contacts, (1936–37) : Ideology, Interest and Conflict over the Basis of Party Representation”, in R. Sisson and S. Wolport (eds.) : *Congress and Indian Nationalism : The Pre-Independence Phase* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988).

2. During the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the emergence of the two formations, one led by the BJP, and the other by Congress (I), was construed as a step towards a simplified polity, as a welcome break with the proliferation of parties. Likewise, the Congress (I)’s support to the Government on economic reforms, in particular the controversial measures seeking to open up the insurance business to the private sector, was erroneously seen as containing the seeds of a major realignment to sprout at some vaguely perceived distant stage. In the first case, the simplistic opinion was revised a few days after the election, and in the second, the assumption collapsed within hours of the Government-Congress (I) “unity” in Lok Sabha.

institutionalised, with ideological lines blurred and social support base non-definitive.

(B)
**THE 'PROCEDURAL' RECONFIGURATION OF
THE NINETIES : THESIS OF THE THIRD
ELECTORAL PHASE**

Since 1989, we have entered a new *electoral phase*, the third one, since the inauguration of democratic elections in 1952. Normally, the expression 'electoral phase' is used in the limited sense of the order of the formal rules, that specify the procedure (first-past-the-post-or, the proportional representation system, for example) followed in elections. In that sense, there has been no change in our electoral structure. But, political historians have also used the same expression to capture a certain constellation, or pattern of outcome and the determinants of the electoral choice that characterised a certain period of history.¹ In this substantive political sense we can talk of a new electoral phase, when we detect its destabilisation, and replacement by a new pattern of electoral outcomes as well as its determinants.

In this substantive sense, the first four general elections from 1952 to 1967 fall under the First Electoral Phase. The one-party dominance of the Congress meant, that the elections in this period were not seriously competitive, and were marked by low levels of electoral participation. The choice was between the

1. In the context of the US political history, see Paul Kleppner : *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892 : Parties, Voters and Political Cultures* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1979). The case for taking seriously the U.S. political history of the late 19th century for understanding contemporary India has been argued persuasively by Robin Archer : "American Communism and Indian Secularism : Religion and Politics in India and the West", *Economic and Political Weekly* (34(15), 10 April, 1999).

omnipresent Congress, and its regionally fragmented opposition; often the opposition came from within the Congress. Electoral loyalties were fixed at the national level, unless the constituency levels preferences dictated short-term deviations from it. The voter, of course, did not vote as an individual, but rather as a member of a politicised *Jati*. Next to the candidates' party, their *jati* had some effect on the voting behaviour. In social terms the castes, which enjoyed the benefits of early entry into modern education, or early politicisation through the national movement or both, dominated the list of elected representatives. The 1967 election signalled a transition, with the monopoly of the Congress, and the *savarna jatis* challenged for the first time.

Although Mrs. Indira Gandhi's unprecedented victory in the 1971 election was initially seen as the restoration of Congress dominance, in retrospect that election marked the beginning of the Second Electoral Phase. The apparent continuity of the Congress was deceptive, the Congress that Mrs. Gandhi led to power in 1971 was a new party that had to negotiate a new terrain of electoral politics.

The move towards the new phase was triggered off by the first democratic upsurge in the late 1960s, which brought new entrants from the 'middle' castes, or the OBCs into the game of electoral politics, and made it truly competitive. Congress was no longer the single dominant party, but throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it continued to be the natural party of governance, the pole around which electoral competition was organised. The success/failure of the attempts by the 'opposition' to put up a united front against the Congress made a decisive difference to the electoral outcome. Elections were turned into plebiscites

where the effective unit of political choice was the entire nation, sometimes split along North-South lines.

A typical electoral verdict in this period took the form of a nation-wide, or some times state-wide wave for or against the Congress. The local specificities of a constituency simply did not matter. These electoral waves flattened the terrain of electoral competition, leaving little room for local variations. In social terms it was a period of cross-sectional mobilisation via state-wide *jati* alliances, like KHAM in Gujarat or AJGAR in U.P. Ideologically, it was an era of populism, as the borrowed framework of Western ideologies was adapted to suit popular taste.¹

On surface, the 1989 electoral verdict appeared no different from the earlier wave elections of the Second Electoral Phase. In many ways, that election indeed belonged to the earlier period. The rise of Mr. V.P. Singh had galvanised the opposition to the Congress. The anti-Congress wave in North India followed the same logic of opposition, unity (captured so well by Butler and Roy's Index of Opposition Unity) as the 1977 wave. The Congress, and the opposition tried their old social alliances. Yet there were signs of the new order yet to be born.

Under the umbrella of Janta Dal, state-wide political formations had already begun to exercise a significant role in national politics. Mr. Devi Lal and Mr. Biju Patnaik were major political players. The election result also carried signs of the shifting social basis of politics: Muslims in U.P. and Dalits and OBCs in Bihar had begun to upset the given social equations of

1. The story of the last 50 years have been narrated at greater length in Yogendra Yadav's contribution-on 'Politics' in *India Briefing: A Transformative Fifty Years* (Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

political parties. In that sense the 1989 elections lies at the cusp of the Second and the Third Electoral Phase.

The decisive stimulus for change came between the 1989 and the 1991 elections, in what was christened as the three Ms of Indian politics: Mandal, Mandir and Market. The almost simultaneous, and sudden occurrence of these three events—the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations for OBC reservations, the BJP'S *rathayatra* that catapulted the Babri Masjid dispute into national prominence, and the forex crisis leading to the implementation of the first phase of IMF sponsored package of 'liberalisation'- created an extraordinary opportunity for reworking the established political alignments. All three offered the possibility of creating new cleavages, that cut across the established cleavage structure and thus engaging in a new kind of political mobilisation. Eventually, not all three could be activated in politics, at least to the same degree. But, the simultaneity of this change did result in a transition of the electoral phase, and allowed several latent forces to surface in electoral politics.

The 1991 verdict finally inaugurated the new phase. The earlier logic of regime alteration, and that of Congress victory in the context of the divided opposition clearly indicated a massive victory for the Congress in 1991, a repetition of the 1980 wave. But it did not happen. The Congress improved only marginally, not enough to have a clear majority. But for the additional votes brought in by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, it would have remained at the same level as in 1989.

The BJP's success in U.P., Gujarat and Karnataka defied the established patterns of political sociology, and political geography. The state parties did not look like a flash in the pan: they were here to stay. Clearly, we were in a new political era.

The near majority that Congress mustered allowed it to postpone the arrival of the familiar consequences for the new phase by another five years. The full implications were to unfold in the 1996, the 1998 and the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. But, the outlines of the new phase were clear in the assembly elections held between 1993 and 1995.¹

Electoral outcomes in the subsequent elections have established beyond doubt that we now live in a different era. But there is no need to recount all the changes here. The rise and fall of the fortune of the political parties, and leaders in this period is too obvious to be missed out, even by a causal spectator. What is required, however, is an account of what has changed politically, not by way of events and personalities, but with reference to the processes and structures, that bind the day-to-day routine of the electoral race. An obsession with the rapidly swinging fortunes in the political games can turn our attention away from silent, yet fundamental, changes in the ground rules of this game. Also, we need to ask whether these fundamental changes have resulted in a meaningful realisation of the promise of electoral democracy, the promise of self-governance.

There are four structural tendencies of the Third Electoral Phase. First, there is a participatory upsurge among the hitherto marginalised sections of the society. Second, there is an influx of lower order beliefs, vocabularies, and homespun ideologies in the discursive practice of democracy. Third, the context for manufacturing electoral majorities has resulted in redefinition of caste identities at a macro-plane. Fourth, the states have emerged as the relevant unit for party and social identity choice.

1. For an overview of that round and a first sketches of the outlines of the new system see Yogendra Yadav : "Reconfiguration of Indian Politics; State Assembly Elections, 1993-95", *Economic and Political Weekly* (31 (2-3), 13-20 January, 1996).

Each of these developments is imbued with a potential for deepening democracy. At the same time, none of them in themselves can guarantee a positive outcome.

The foremost characteristic that underlies many other changes is the participatory upsurge, that the elections at various level have witnessed in the 1990s. The upsurge does not always show up in any dramatic jump in the overall turnout figures, and that is why analysts have tended not to notice it. But, there is now sufficient evidence to conclude, that the electoral political arena in this period has witnessed greater participation and more intense politicisation than before.¹

This tendency is particularly strong among the *shudras*, used here as a generic category including women.² The rural area has now overtaken the urban constituencies in the electoral turnout. The proportion of women among the voters have gone up after stagnating for nearly two decades. Their proportion among the politically active citizen have registered a major leap. The dominant peasant proprietor OBCs were already fairly politicised in the Second Phase, but now there is an extension of this trend to the lower OBCs as well.

The odds that a Dalit will vote, are today much higher than that for an upper caste. This has been accompanied by a significant rise in their sense of efficacy, and their involvement in more active forms of political participation. This is perhaps due to the fact that it was only in this decade, that a sizeable chunk of Dalit electors were able to actually exercise their voting right for the first time, especially in North India. The huge turnout gap

1. See, for example, Yogendra Yadav's "Second Democratic Upsurge; Patterns of Bahujan Participation in Electoral Politics in the 1990s" in the volume edited by Francine Frankel, (Delhi, OUP, 1999).

2. Here is followed the original meaning of term 'shudra politics' by Dr. Lohia.

between the *adivasi* and the non-*adivasi* voter has been bridged in the last four elections, though the *adivasi* citizen is yet to catch up in the active forms of political participation.

As the *shudra* participation increased in the last ten years, the socially, and economically privileged sections of society recorded decreasing levels of political participation. An urban, educated, upper caste citizen is far more likely to be non-participant, and cynical about matters political, than his counterpart among the rural, illiterate, lower caste. Even a cursory glance at the participation profile in other democracies is enough to demonstrate, that this trend is unusual.

The text book rule about political participation is that the higher you are in social hierarchy, the greater is the chance of your participating in political activity, including voting. Contemporary India is perhaps an exception to this rule among functioning democracies. The participatory upsurge of the Dalits is the defining characteristic of the Third Electoral Phase. The continuous influx of the people from the lower order of the society in the arena of the democratic contestation provides the setting, the stimuli, and the limits to how the election dynamics unfolds.

The second characteristic of the new phase follows from the first, though the transition is far from direct. The influx of lower orders into the field of democratic contestation has left its impression on the vocabulary of this contestation, for the new entrants brought with them their beliefs as well. For the first time, the neat arrangement of the borrowed high ideological spectrum was disturbed by homespun ideological fragments. The raw narratives of social justice articulated by a Kanshi Ram or a Laloo Yadav achieved what Lohia's sophisticated philosophy of history failed to do three decades ago, namely, to make it

respectable to talk about caste in the public political domain. The emergence of 'social justice' as a rubric to talk about caste equity, political representation of castes and communities, and issues of communitarian self respect and identity is a distinct achievement of this period.

Yet, the participatory upsurge has not led to anything like an effective control of the lower order on the issues, or the agenda of elections. The very raw narratives, that ensured the presence of 'social justice' as a theme, also allowed for the marginalisation, and containment of this concern. The homespun ideological fragments of this period were based on limited visions, that failed to develop linkages with other larger issues. A support for caste-based reservations, for instance, did not translate into any concrete stances on the Babri Masjid dispute, or on liberalisation or globalisation. This failure was most marked in the realm of the economic policy, which was effectively withdrawn from the menu available to the voter.

This was made possible in the large measure by the bifurcation of the electorate into two circles of intelligibility.¹ While the new entrants to democratic politics struggled to express their local concerns, and interests in the alien vocabulary of liberal democracy, the elite marched further away for its rendezvous with the so-called global village. This gave rise to two radically different languages of politics corresponding to the Bhasha/English divide. The former, a language of democratic rights, and social justice, was deployed to win elections while the latter, a language of macro-economic and bureaucratic

1. This expression is borrowed from Sudipta Kaviraj's analysis of the nationalist discourse. Several Subaltern Studies historians have made a similar point about the disjunction between elite ideologies and mass beliefs. Partha Chatterjee's remarks on the parallel between the peasant insurgencies in colonial India and electoral waves in the post-colonial times point in the direction of a sub-field of research that is waiting to be developed.

management, guided the framing of policies. While one section had the consolation of winning the elections, the other could continue to rule. Just when the lower orders managed some access to political power, the most significant economic decisions were removed from the political agenda.

The third characteristic relates to the changing relationship between social cleavages, and politics of electoral mobilisation. If one goes by popular accounts, the rise of casteism, and its grip over electoral politics is the distinctive attribute of the 1990s, that is undermining, perhaps decisively, the traditional caste hierarchy of a social order which has dominated for centuries the lives of most Hindus.¹ But such an account suffers from serious flaws. For one, caste has been operating in electoral politics for as long as we know. Candidates' *jati* was a crucial factor in electoral success even in the 1950s. Besides, the relationship between caste and politics is not just one way traffic. Politics affects caste as much as caste affects politics. What is distinctive about the current phase is not the deadly mix of these two, or the vicious grip of caste over politics, but rather the manner in which politics has come to shape caste identities.²

In the First Electoral Phase, the effective social bloc was a *jati* in its local setting. In the Second Phase, *Jati* remained the primary bloc, but the game of manufacturing electoral majorities led to the building of state-wide alliance of *jatis*. An extension of the same search for stable electoral majorities has led to the replacement of *jati* by state-wide *Jati* clusters or *varna* like *jati* groupings as the primary social bloc for political mobilisation.

1. C.J. Fuller (ed.): *Caste Today* (OUP, Delhi, 1996), p. 39.

2. D.L. Sheth's paper, "Secularisation of Caste", is the most comprehensive and nuanced recent statement on the vexed relationship between caste and politics, presented at the Seminar at CSDS, (August, 1999).

The emergence of upper caste, or upper/lower OBC, or Dalit as more or less homogeneous category in some North Indian states is a pointer in this direction.

The same process can be seen at work in the emergence of numerically large castes by combining more than one traditional *jati*: Kshatriyas in Gujarat, Marthas-Kunabis in Maharashtra, Ahirs in Bihar, Rajbanshis in Bengal, or Bhandaris in Goa are examples of the shifting definition of the primary social unit itself. To be sure, this development cannot be dated back only to the last ten years. Many of these communities had started evolving much earlier. Nor does this new process work to the exclusion of the earlier model of *jati* alliances. Yet, it captures something of the qualitative transformation in this respect.

Beyond this level of generality, there is little that is common to all the states in terms of the patterns of social cleavages activated by politics. Not only are specific permutations unique to each state due to its social demography, but the nature of cleavage itself varies from state to state. If Andhra and Rajasthan represent a contest between two catch-all parties, U.P. and Bihar show evidence of extreme *jati/varna* polarisation. If religious cleavage accounts for voting differentials in Punjab and Kerala. If it is class in Delhi and Bengal. If the Congress is the party of the downtrodden when it faces the BJP in the North-West, it represents privileges where it confronts the Left Front.

The BJP combines its upper caste votes with different social groups in different states. The erstwhile Janta Dal represented three radically different social groups in the three states where it mattered: cross-sectional support with accent on the upper castes in Orissa, dominant peasant proprietors in Karnataka, and Dalit-Lower OBC in Bihar. Such a differentiation

of the social cleavages is itself a new feature of the Third Electoral Phase. While it allows various marginal communities to have a say in state politics, such a large variety has not allowed the building of a large coalition of marginalised communities that might give them a role in the national politics.

Clearly, the lower caste politicians are divided, but there appears to be an upper threshold in their internal battles. The internal divisions have not led to a wholehearted embrace of the BJP for the sake of power and to settle internal conflicts. That the BJP and the BSP could not come together after the U.P. elections in 1996 should indicate, that homespun ideology has become a serious element in Indian politics.¹ The non-ideological, purely power-based coalition making of the 1970s and the 1980s is not over, but it appears to be in serious decline.

Another common belief is that whatever the exact nature of the social cleavages, there is tendency towards greater political polarisation along those cleavages. Once again the available evidence does not support this belief.² It is true that the rise of a party like BJP that has a skewed social base did increase the overall level of ethnic/social polarisation in the early 1990s. In the state like U.P. where the BJP faces two other skewed parties in the BSP and the SP, there has been an unusually high level of polarisation of votes along caste/community lines in the last decade. But that is not true for the rest of the country. In fact, the 1998, and further, the 1999 elections revealed a decline in the overall level of polarisation.

1. Sudha Pai : "From Harijans to Dalits: identity formation, political consciousness and electoral mobilisation of the schedule castes in Uttar Pradesh", in Verma (ed) : *Schedule Caste Movements in India* (Vikas, Delhi, 1998), pp. 89-94.

2. See, Prof. Anthony Heath and Yogendra Yadav : "The Changing Patterns of Community and Vote from 1962 to 1998", *CSDS Research Project*, 2000.

The fourth structural feature, namely, the emergence of the state (region) as the effective unit of electoral choice, does not follow from any of the first three, in fact there is some case for arguing that the first three features are a result of the fourth. Electoral choice in the Lok Sabha elections in the fifties and sixties was hardly influenced by the boundaries of the state. Under the Second Phase, the state was a distant secondary consideration in the nation-wide plebiscites. Barring states like Kerala and West Bengal, that had emerged as exception, it was the North-South distinction, that made any difference to the electoral outcomes rather than state boundaries.

Throughout the seventies and the eighties, people voted in state assembly elections as if they were electing a prime minister. The nineties have witnessed a radical shift in this respect. There is an unmistakable foregrounding of the regional state in the political horizon of citizens. Political loyalties, opinions, and even social identities are now chosen at the level of the state. People now vote in the parliamentary elections, as if they are choosing a state government. State specific electoral verdicts, the rise of state-wide parties, and the emergence of state-wide *jati/varna* clusters, as the effective categories of electoral mobilisation in the 1990s are all manifestations of this structural attribute.

The rise of state politics has been viewed with suspicion by the English press as the beginning of political fragmentation, if not Balkanisation of India. Such a reading fails to note that, this development is a function of an aggregative rather than disintegrative process at work in our polity. It is better interpreted as the first step on the Indian path towards the creation of a mass society through the mechanism of competitive politics. In a continental size polity like ours, it is precisely by articulating, rather than suppressing the distinctiveness of states, that a context for massification is prepared.

Far from setting the stage for further fragmentation, or effective decentralisation within these states, the ascendancy of the states indicates a high degree of homogenisation within each of these states. Whatever the implications for national integration, it is fairly clear that its implications for Indian democracy are positive. The context of state politics brings political choices closer to the everyday political experience of the people, and provides them an opportunity to evaluate the governance, that affects them most. That still leaves out a nuanced constituency specific assessment by the voters, but arguably the micro-level anti-incumbency at work in the 'nineties' takes care of that gap.

Let us now turn to the effect of these structural attributes on the actual electoral choices exercised by the voters in the Third Electoral Phase. Do these changes offer more choice to the people than they had in the previous phase? And, do they exercise these choices more effectively than before?

Undoubtedly, the choice set available to the voter has changed considerably in 1999 as compared to what it was in 1989. Earlier the voter exercised only single choice—whether to vote for or against the Congress. That is no longer the case, and not just because there are many non-Congress alternatives. Even in those states where there is a direct race between the Congress and its rival, the Congress is no longer the natural party of governance.

The vote for the Left Front in West Bengal, and Kerala had long ceased to be merely an anti-Congress vote; it is more meaningful to perceive the Congress vote in West Bengal as the anti-Left Front vote. In Delhi, Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Congress has been replaced by the BJP as the natural party of governance. In Bihar, U.P., and Tamil Nadu any talk of

Congress/anti-Congress vote is bound to invite ridicule today. In this sense, we are in a post-Congress polity. The Congress in there to stay, and may even comes back to power, but the Congress era is behind us in politics.

The BJP has undergone a three-fold expansion in the 'nineties'. In geographic terms it has expanded much beyond its North Indian, Hindi heartland to include Gujarat and Maharashtra in its core areas. More importantly, it has developed substantial presence in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar, and a foothold in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. In social terms, it is no longer an urban *Bania-Brahmin* Party. It has developed a formidable rural base, extending well into the OBCs, and some *adivasis*. In political ideological terms, the party has expanded to win the confidence of various allies, who have little patience with its Hinduṭva ideology. In this respect the formation of the National Democratic Alliance, and the alliance with DMK, and PMK reflects how much the political alternatives have changed in this decade.

The third space, the alternative outside the Congress, and the BJP fold, has seen major ups and downs in this period. Yet some developments are here to stay. The rise of the BSP as a recognised national party deserves more notice. After all, it is the first truly new party, whose genealogy cannot be traced back to the parties at the time of Independence, that has managed to cross the high threshold of viability under our first-past-the-post-system. Most other new entrants have managed to cross that threshold only at the state-level.

In this context, the rise of the state parties has changed the nature of political alternatives. Parties like the Samajwadi Party, Samta Party, Rashtriya Janta Dal, Nationalist Congress Party, Nationalist Lok Dal, and arguably Ms. Mamta's Trinmul

Congress, or the TMC in Tamil Nadu are not cast in the same mould as the classical regional parties like the Akalis, or the DMK, or the TDP. Their political presence is state specific, but their political vision is not. Each of these would go out of their way to claim that they are a national party.

In some sense, the Left parties belong to the same category. They are the only formation not to have undergone a basic metamorphosis in their geographical, or regional profile in the last decade, though they are more confined to their regional pockets, and are little more lower-class and caste-based than before. The third space has emerged in this decade, as the spring of political alternatives. Its failure to consolidate into an all-India third formation has, in fact, helped to retain a diversity of political choices within the mainstream of national politics.

All in all then, electoral choices have expanded in terms of the number of the political parties, that seriously contest the elections, and can put up viable candidates. The number of political parties, that have gained entry to the Lok Sabha has gone up dramatically, which does not indicate their real strength. There is little evidence to support the popular belief, that this figure reflects a fragmentation of the party system, or a mad proliferation of parties.

Yet, if we calculate the number of parties by their effective share of votes, or seats, we find a marginal increase. But, that is the function of the artificial aggregation at the national-level. If we look at the number of effective parties at the state-level, or at the constituency level, we find basically a bipolar competition. Duverger's Law that postulates the emergence of two-party system in a first past-the-post electoral procedure does not work in India too, except that it works at the state-level. Instead of producing a simple bi-polarity at the national-level, it has

resulted into multiple bipolarities. It does indicate an expansion in choice, but not of the kind suggested by the first impression of the national figure of the number of political parties.

Notwithstanding the new entrants, our system continues to maintain high barriers for new comers, especially for those that operate at the level below that of a state. In practice, all the people's movements, that stand for attempts to build political alternatives operate at the local level, and find it impossible to cross the minimum threshold of viability. The last decade has seen various experiments by the erstwhile non-party formations to register their presence in the electoral arena: Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Karnataka Rajya Rayyata Sangha, UTJAS in North Bengal, Samta Sangthan in Orissa and Bihar, Bahujan Mahasangha in Maharashtra, to name a few.

The eventual outcome has either been a complete failure (even in those areas where these movements and their leaders have for a long time enjoyed mass support) or a gradual absorption after initial success. Clearly the present phase has little room for micro political action to translate into an effective political alternative. The failure of any third force to develop downward linkages with grassroots movements, and upward linkages with each other in a national framework largely accounts for the absence of genuine, and effective political alternatives in the Third Electoral Phase.

Whatever the choice set available to the voters, the election outcome of the last decade indicates, that they use it quite effectively, and often discerningly. Barring a few exceptions, all the state governments have faced defeat at the polls. Those who did not, were governments that did perform in one respect or the other. It is true that the overall electoral volatility, a useful index of the effective exercise of political choice by the voters, has

reduced in the elections of the 'nineties'. The wild swing of votes that characterised the wave elections in the Second Phase does not occur anymore, at least to that extreme.

But this does not mean that voters are more docile than before. The reduction in aggregate volatility seems to be a function of the fact that voters do not change hands across a simple Congress/non-Congress divide. The old notions of a Congress and a non-Congress vote do not hold any water now, though some analysts continue to use these terms. Even if the same proportion of voters change their mind between two elections as they did in the past, the overall results fluctuate less wildly, for there is multiway transaction of votes.

Electoral volatility has also taken the form of localised anti-incumbency. Often there is a large-scale turnover of seats and candidates, even when the overall party position does not undergo much change. The Madhya Pradesh Assembly election of 1998 provides a classic example. The Congress won 172 seats (compared to 175 in 1993) as against 119 for the BJP (compared to 117 in 1993). One would normally have expected that both parties retained practically all the seats they won last time. In reality, however, the Congress and the BJP retained only 103 and 50 seats respectively. The Congress lost 59 seats to BJP and won 60 from it.

The voters have also been effective in bringing about a noticeable change in the composition of the political elite. Politics of presence or representational democracy is the most immediate form of assertion by the newly enfranchised communities. To those already enfranchised, this is the time to advance for higher forms of political representation. To be sure, this change is very uneven, and holds mainly for numerically large, and electorally decisive communities.

As such, the OBCs are the biggest gainer in the race for political parties to accommodate them in their organisational, and legislative wings. There is no appreciable increase in the presence of women in the legislatures, nor have the Muslims gained much from it. Yet, times of political turbulence, close electoral contests and frequent elections bring numerous gains to marginal groups. A large number of lower OBC castes have had their first MLA, or the first MP in this decade. It is in this decade that India had two prime ministers from the South and the first Dalit woman as chief minister.

In the limited sense described above, the Third Electoral Phase represents a relative expansion of democratic choice for the voters as well as their efficacy. But, if we raise these questions to a more fundamental level, we confront the limits of what may have been achieved. Does the increase in the number of political options represent a substantive expansion of choice? Or, do we have more of the same, or perhaps more of the less? This not to reiterate the universal scepticism about the nature of choice in liberal democracies.

In recent times, the political space in India has shrunk markedly, because the mainstream parties, mainly the Congress and the BJP, are more like each other in most crucial policy matters. The entire political spectrum of mainstream political options offer a limited range of policy options. This problem becomes compounded, if we add the difficulty of exercising the policy options available. Here again, the reference is not merely to the gap between the promise, and the reality of collective action. In contemporary India the chain that links peoples' needs to their felt desire to their articulated demand to its aggregation, and finally, to its translation into public policy is impossibly long, and notoriously weak. People often use elections effectively

to choose their representatives, and the government, but rarely can they use elections to choose policies about issues that matter most of them.

These achievements, and limitations of the Third Electoral Phase can be understood in the context of the larger democratic transition, that India is going through. In a sense, the 1990s represent the full unfolding of the contradiction between the political equality and social inequality, that Dr. Ambedkar had pointed out during the Constitution Assembly debate. The turbulence of this decade can be traced to the fact that the dynamics of political equality triggered off by universal adult franchise, and the structure of socio-economic inequality inherited from the past have both crossed a certain threshold without either being able to tame the other completely. As the participatory upsurge leads to a downward spread of democracy, and the political process acquires enough confidence to subordinate ritual social hierarchy, we came up against the limits of what can be done to the structure of economic inequality that seeks to delink itself from politics. Electoral politics in the 1990s is, but a reflection of this basic contradiction.

(C)
**THE PSEPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE 'FRACTIONALISED MANDATE' OF
THE NINETIES**

Is Indian politics more fractionalised now in the decade of 'nineties' then it has been in the past? The obvious answer would seem to be yes. We have just witnessed a succession of unstable governments; alliances and coalitions are made, broken and changed almost at whim, and the balance of power seems to be

held not by those at the Centre, but by an assortment minority parties on the fringes. However, can this instability at the Centre be attributed to the growing number of parties that now have representation in the Lok Sabha?

TABLE-1

Number of Parties, Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999													
Years	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
Parties(S)	21	13	21	19	25	19	18	22	25	25	29	40	35
Parties(V)	74	21	30	26	53	57	37	44	122	146	210	177	189

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Notes: Parties (S) refers to the number of different parties that was at least one seat in that elections, and Parties(V) to the number of parties that contested the election.

Indian political parties have, without doubt, fragmented over the years. Frequent party splits, mergers and counter splits have dramatically increased the number of parties that now contest elections. In 1952, 74 parties tried their hand at electoral success, whilst in 1999 this number had swollen to 189. The number of parties to contest elections underwent a significant leap in 1989, and has remained historically high ever since. However, it is contended here that changes at the national level drastically misrepresent the nature and type of political contests, that actually take place in India. The *hypothesis* is that instead of viewing India as a multi-party system, it makes more sense to describe it as being a collection of two party systems.

To test this hypothesis, it is necessary to employ a standardised measure of fractionalisation. As Laasoka and Taagepera¹ argue, it does not necessarily follows, that an absolute increase in political parties leads to an increase in political fractionalisation. For example, in 1952 there were 21

1. R. Taagepera and M. Shugart : *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems* (New Haven, Yale University Press, , 1989).

different political parties, that had representation in the Lok Sabha. It would clearly be ridiculous to classify India at that time as being a 21-party-system. Congress won a handsome majority of seats and even if all the other parties united under one umbrella, their opposition would still not have been nearly enough to topple the government. Laasoka and Taagepera therefore, suggest that a more practical way of describing the number of parties in a system is to measure them in terms of their effectiveness.

To measure 'effectiveness', the political parties are weighted according to their respective size. For example, in 1952 Congress won 364 out of a total of 489 seats. Its fractional share of seats was $364/489 = 0.74$. Its weighting is the square of its fractional share, which is thus $0.74^2 = 0.55$. The CPI, which was the second placed party won 16 seats, thus giving it a fractional share of 0.03 and weighting of 0.0009. The index's weighting gives greater emphasis to parties, which dominate the political arena, thus reflecting their political might, and less emphasis to those parties on the periphery. For example, in the above case Congress's weighting was 74% of its fractional seat share, whilst CPI's weighting was just 3% of its fractional seat share.

These calculations are repeated for each party to win a seat. In other words, we sum the square of each party's proportion of seats. By taking the inverse of this total, we get the number of effective parties that have representation. The number of effective parties, or the fractionalisation index, can therefore be expressed as $N_s = 1 / \sum p_s^2$, where N_s is the number of effective parties based on seat share, and p_s is the proportion of seats that each party secured. In case of 1952, this equals 1.7. Similarly, the index can also be calculated using the proportion of votes secured by each party as its base, thus $N_v = 1 / \sum p_v^2$. For

Nv, there is no need to draw a cut off mark to determine which parties should be included in the calculation, such as whether they won a seat or not, as the smaller a party's vote share is, the smaller its impact will be on the number of effective parties. Therefore, all parties to have contested an election have been included in the following calculations.

One must be very careful to distinguish between what N can tell us and what it can't. The index, to a certain extent, is an abstract quantification. The value of N signifies the hypothetical number of equal sized parties, that would produce on equivalent degree of fractionalisation in the political system. In reality there are many different constellations, that are capable of producing an identical value for N.

For example, the following vote shares of 34%, 33%, 33% and 45%, 29%, 21%, 5% and 17%, 16% all produce the same value of $N=3.0$.¹ In this respect, the index is not able to tell us anything about the actual distribution of votes, or seats amongst the parties, or how many parties share what proportion of the vote. That is to say, it does not look at how the internal composition of contests has changed, but at how the type contest itself has changed. What it gives us is an approximation to the kind of constellation that would produce a similar result. In this sense then, the fractionalisation is best interpreted as a simile for the actual fractionalisation, that exists in the real world. However, as a rule of thumb, the number of effective parties is approximately equal to the number of parties that obtain 10%, or more of the vote.²

1. Ibid., p. 259

2. Ibid., p. 79

TABLE-2

Effective Number of Political Parties in the Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999													
Years	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
Ns	1.7	1.7	1.9	3.1	2.1	2.6	2.3	1.7	4.1	3.6	5.8	5.4	5.3
Nv	4.1	3.5	4.2	4.7	4.4	3.4	4.2	3.9	4.7	5.1	6.9	6.9	6.2

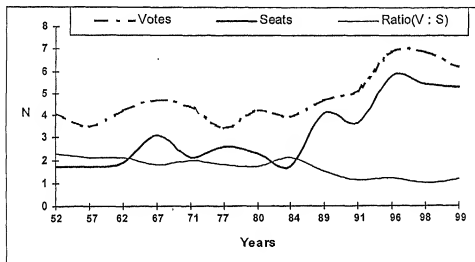
Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Table-2 shows the number of effective parties, that were based on both seats, and vote share. By calculating the index with reference to seats and votes, it is possible to see whether a fractionalised Ns is the product of a fractionalised Nv, or whether the two indices display different patterns of behaviour. If the latter is the case, then one needs to carefully ask why fractionalisation, is occurring at one level but not the other. In this respect, the Nv is a more accurate indication to the degree of fractionalisation, as it reflects the actions of the voters, rather than the effect of the constituency boundaries. We will, therefore, look at both values for N, and see what the relationship is between them.

The concern over growing fractionalisation would appear to be borne out by the results from this table. During the period of Congress dominance in the fifties, and the early sixties, the number of effective parties in the Lok Sabha was consistently below two, thus reflecting the overwhelming majority of seats that Congress enjoyed at that time. 1967 marked the end of Congress electoral stronghold, and this is reflected by an increase in Ns and Nv. The lowest value for Nv is 3.4 in 1977. This election was noted for the degree of unity, that was shown amongst the opposition in opposing Congress. Surprisingly, the lowest level of fractionalisation for Ns is in 1984, which is largely due to the disproportionate number of seats, that Congress won from its vote share. Despite winning only 48% of vote, Mr. Rajiv

Gandhi's Congress swept aside all opposition, winning 415 out of 542 seats in the Lok Sabha. Both of the values for N reached unprecedented levels in 1996 and 1998, and a steady upward trend can be seen from 1984 onwards, with 1989 making the onset of high national fractionalisation.

The growth in the number of effective parties is not the only story that the data tells. One of the interesting features that is shown is the relationship between N_v and N_s . As is to be



Seats and Votes Lok Sabha : 1952-1999

expected, the number of effective parties is much higher for votes than it is for seats. This is a common occurrence in all electoral systems, regardless whether they are proportional representation, or are first-past-the-post. The general trend is for small parties to receive less than their proportional share of seats, and for large parties to receive more, thus exaggerating their political dominance. The magnitude to which these sources of over, and under representation occur, reveals the representativeness of the political system. The graph shows that the gap between the two has greatly reduced. 1952 N_v was 2.4 times bigger than N_s , while in 1999, it has shrunk so that it was

just 1.3 times bigger. Since 1984, when the disparity between the two has tended to narrow. This indicates a growth in proportionality of the Indian political system.

However, the national picture does not really tell us much more than what we already know, so let us now turn to the story of the states.

TABLE-3

Effective Number of Political Parties, State Averages for Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999													
Years	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
Ns	1.7	1.7	2.0	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.6	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.8	2.7
Nv	3.6	3.0	3.5	3.2	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.4

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Notes : For Ns, states with one or two constituencies have been excluded from the calculation. As it is not possible for them to have more than two effective parties, even the most fragmented vote would still paint a picture of relative consensus. The states and union territories are Mizoram, Nagaland, Pondicherry, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Daman & Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Lakshadweep, and Sikkim, with one seat each, and Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura with two seats each. For Nv the above-mentioned have is included, as their presence does not distort the overall picture.

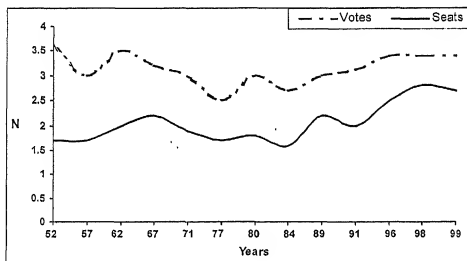
In the Table-3 the values for N report the average number of effective political parties across the states. Later, we will look at the individual states separately, but to start with this table provides a useful overview of what has happened in the last decade of the twentieth century in comparison to previous forty years, and whether there has been any sign of a different pattern to that which we noticed at the national-level.

The first thing to notice is that the effective number of parties is much lower than it is at the national level, which is true for both Nv and Ns. Indeed, it is not just lower, which in itself is not surprising, but it actually conforms very closely to the classic picture of a two party system. It is only in 1996, 1998

and 1999 that the Ns can be said to move closely resemble something else, as they are both closer to three than they are to two effective parties.

Nv and Ns show slightly differing patterns of behaviour. Although, there is a similar upward trend beginning in 1984, there is no sign of the marked jump in the 1990s for Nv that was seen nationally, or is even seen at the state-level for Ns. What's more, Nv is in fact, lower in the 1990s than it was in the early fifties and sixties. The overall trend since 1952 is for Ns to tend slightly upward, while Nv has basically remained constant, with a slight downward tendency.

Although, it would seem from the state averages, that there has not been a significant increase in the fractionalisation of Nv in the 1990s, there is always the concern, that averages may be disguising conflicting patterns by merely reporting a mid-value



Seat and Votes, State Averages, 1952-1999

between two extremes. It is therefore, important to examine whether any states display significantly different behaviour to that of the average, and if so, whether this behaviour marked a significant change to what the state had previously shown.

TABLE-4

Distribution of States by Ns, 1952-1999													
Ns	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
1-1.4	9	9	5	5	7	9	9	11	2	3	1	1	1
1.5-2.4	6	6	10	8	8	4	6	5	10	12	10	7	6
2.5-3.4	2	2	1	4	2	5	2	2	5	2	5	5	6
3.5-4.4	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	4
4.5 +	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	1
Total	18	17	17	18	18	18	18	18	17	17	18	18	18

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Table-4 shows the frequency distribution for Ns by state. Since 1984, there has been dramatic reduction in the number of states, that have essentially one effective party. This trend has been matched by an increase in the number of states, which most closely resemble two effective parties, thus indicating a growth in competitiveness.

The number of states with around three effective parties has waxed and waned over the years, although, in terms of ten year averages, there has been little difference. It was lowest from 1952-62, when the average number of states with Ns= 3 was 1.7. However, since then, there have only been small changes. From 1967-77, the average was 3.7, from 1980-89, the average was 3, and from 1991-99, the average was 4. Since 1989, the number has tended to be towards the top end of the scale, but depending upon which time you choose to look at, you can find conflicting patterns. Therefore, it is probably best not to read too much into it. The most notable change to have occurred, is the growth in the number of states to have approximately four or more effective parties. In 1998 and 1999, the number was considerably larger than it had been in the previous years. This change does not fit in with the assumption, that 1989 was the beginning of the

upsurge, and although 1998 and 1999 seem to be the most fractionalised at state-level, nationally it was, in fact, lower than 1996.

However, sharp changes at state-level could have ramifications at the national-level. Therefore, we need to see whether we can attribute the jump in effective parties in the 1990s to any states, that showed markedly different patterns from their norm. This is best analysed with respect to N_v , as by looking at how voting patterns have changed, we can get a better idea of what has been happening on the ground.

The somewhat haphazard nature of Table-5 makes it rather difficult to talk of any clear trends. Although, the mode has remained approximately equal to the mean, the proportion of states, that it represents has undergone major changes.

TABLE-5

Distribution of States by N_s , 1952-1999													
N_v	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
1.0-1.4	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	1	-	2	-	1	1
1.5-2.4	1	2	1	2	9	19	8	12	7	7	8	7	9
2.5-3.4	8	14	9	11	9	8	16	14	16	13	9	10	8
3.5-4.4	8	3	8	8	5	-	5	2	7	5	7	7	7
4.5 +	3	-	1	4	3	3	2	2	1	4	8	7	7
Ave.	3.6	3.0	3.5	3.2	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.4
Total	20	19	19	27	27	31	31	31	31	31	32	32	32

Broadly speaking, the distribution of the states falls into three main categories. Between 1952 and 1967, the vast majority of states had 3 and 4 effective parties. From 1971 to 1984, there were essentially 2 and 3 effective parties, and from 1989 onwards, there has been a greater spread in the frequency of states for values of N_v , with not so much clustering around any particular set of values.

As was the case with Ns, it is at the top end of the scale, where the most noticeable changes have occurred. Have these states always been prone to fractionalisation, or are they new additions? The answer is basically yes and no. In the 1990s, the most fractionalised state, i.e., those with over five effective parties were Assam, Bihar, Kerala and U.P. in 1991, Assam, Bihar, Kerala, U.P., Haryana, J & K and Maharashtra in 1996, Bihar, Kerala, Manipur, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in 1998, and Bihar Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab and West Bengal in 1999. However, out of all these states only J & K, Maharashtra and Haryana were on new territory in the nineties. With the exception of Andhra Pradesh in 1952, it is the same states that keep cropping up in the over five bracket.

This indicates the state patterns have remained fairly consistent over time. To test this assumption, we can take 1998 as an example, and compare the Nv for each state with its average Nv since 1952.

TABLE-6

Change in Nv from Mean, 1998	
Difference from mean	No. of States
+/-0.5	20
+/-1.0	8
+/-1.5	1
+/-2.0	3

As Table-6 shows, in 1998, the overwhelming majority of states were within plus or minus half an effective party of their mean. This shows a high degree of stability over time. Therefore, any upsurge in fractionalisation, that has taken place has only really occurred in a small number of states. The four states that were more than 1.5 effective parties away from their mean were Bihar, Haryana, Manipur and Tamil Nadu.

What we have then, is a story of continuity and change. To some extent, there is variation within years across states, but on the other hand, there is remarkable continuity in states across years. In some sense, this continuity is more important than the variation, as it tells us, that on the whole, what is happening now is not a new set of phenomena, but is instead rooted in the past.

In the same way, that the state analysis shows different patterns to the national aggregations, it is also possible, that the constituency contests follow different trends to the state aggregation. Therefore, the next step is to look at the number of effective parties in the constituencies (Table-7). The constituency-level offers us the most accurate indication of where fractionalisation stems from. It is at this level, where the electorate actively exercises their votes, and there seems to be little sign of fractionalisation, or even increased fractionalisation here.

TABLE-7

Effective Number of Political Parties by Vote, Constituency Averages for Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999													
Years	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
Nv	3.3	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.4	2.1	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.9	3.0	2.7	2.8

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

As we can see, there has been virtually no change in the value of Nv over the course of the elections, and more specifically, there has been none that is significant. The average number of effective parties since Independence is 2.7, which is exactly the same as the Nv for 1998. Therefore, we can say that 1998 was normal.

TABLE-8

Distribution of States by Nv, Constituency Averages, 1952-1999													
Nv	52	57	62	67	71	77	80	84	89	91	96	98	99
1.0-1.4	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	2	-	1	1
1.5-2.4	11	13	12	8	18	24	17	20	17	11	11	13	11
2.5-3.4	6	5	6	4	7	6	12	9	14	14	15	16	18
3.5-4.4	-	1	-	4	1	-	1	1	-	4	5	2	1
4.5+	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Total	19	19	19	17	27	31	30	31	31	31	32	32	31

Table 8 shows the distribution of states by their values for Nv. The values reported are for the average of the constituency Nv in each state. The state was disaggregation of constituency results back up what the averages told us. There has been very little discernible change in the distribution of Nv over the course of the elections. The majority of the states hover around the two or three effective party mark. In the 'nineties' there is a slightly more consolidated move into $Nv = 4$, although it is still less significant than was seen in 1967.

The states and union territories with value above $NV = 3.5$ are Assam, Haryana, U.P. and Chandigarh in 1991; Assam, Haryana, J. & K., Manipur, U.P. and Chandigarh in 1996; Goa and Manipur in 1998; and Manipur and Tamil Nadu in 1999. The presence of Manipur, Chandigarh and Goa can be largely ignored, as they are so small, that their constituency average does not tell us any thing different to their state average, as they are basically the same thing.

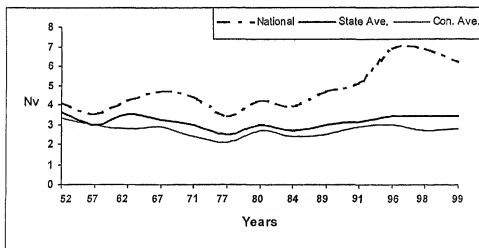
Now, if we compare these remaining state to the ones that we identified in the state-level analysis, we can observe a fair amount of continuity. The above states all featured in our earlier high fractionalisation bracket. However, the continuity is only one way, as there were states that featured in Table-5, that do not feature here, such as Bihar, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. A large part of the reason for this

discrepancy can be put down to coalitions that took place in these states. With the exception of Bihar in 1991, all these states had electoral alliances involving major political parties. This means, that to a large extent, the decision of who to vote for is removed from the voters' hands. Thus, one can say, that the state-level fractionalisation is some what manufactured.

However, on the whole there is remarkable continuity between the degree of fractionalisation shown at the state, and at constituency level. The relationship between the two is very close, with all but the above mentioned states having value of Nv falling within 1.5 times of each other.

By plotting the results from the different levels of aggregation on the same graph, one can explicitly observe what the relationship between them is. The sharp rise of national Nv is not reciprocated by similar behaviour at the state, and constituency level. The Nv's at these lower levels of aggregation remained fairly stable over time. What is more, they both follow almost exactly the same pattern. Thus, we can say that the state-level to a large degree reflects what is happening in the constituencies.

The crucial point that the data brings out is the fractionalisation operates on the essentially two levels in India.



Effective Number of Political Parties, 1952-1999

The top level and the most fractionalised, is the national level. Since 1989, there has been a definite, and significant increase in its numbers of the effective parties. However, the national picture only tells us about the aggregated outcome of the vote, and not about the type of the contest. Judging by the degree of fractionalisation in India, by just looking at the national picture gives a misleading impression of how elections are fought. It is somewhat akin to assessing fractionalisation in Europe by grouping all the parties of all the countries together, and concluding that there are lots of different parties.

In the case of India, as with Europe, the level of analysis that is most revealing is the one that is most closely related to the outcome of people's vote. Therefore, to understand how the actual contests have changed, one must look at the constituency, and state-level, as this is the level that voters act on, and relate to.

The dynamics of party competition at state-level has shown little sign of increased fractioanlisation in the 'nineties'. This indicates that the fragmentation at the national level is not representative of the actual types of contests, that exist in the direct competition between parties. Thus, one cannot say that the fractionalisation at the national-level represents a fractionalised mandate, as on the whole the mandate of the people is fairly clear: it is just that the clarity only exists within the context of state, rather than national politics.

The implication of these two conflicting patterns of fractionalisation makes the possibility of a single party securing an overall majority in the Lok Sabha, in the near future, very slim. The lack of disruption that the increase in effective parties at the national-level has hād on state contests, indicates the growth of one party has been evenly matched by the decline of

another. The transformation in the composition of parties at the state-level has been almost seamless. In this instance, it is the regional parties that have prospered, and the national parties, normally Congress, that have suffered.

Thus, we are left in a position where politics only make sense at the state-level. A reversal of this situation is not likely to happen overnight, and any move towards fewer effective parties at national-level is only likely to happen at the cost of an increase in fractionalisation at state-level. It would, therefore, seem that the major issue now facing any party, that hopes to form a government at the Centre is not how to win an overall majority, but how to form strong, and secure inter-state alliances.

CHAPTER 3

COALITION POLITICS : THE STATES

The states in India, which are large political units, can be studied both as a part of the larger Indian political system, and as an independent and a total system in itself. In a federal system, the states are affected and in turn affect the national system. It can be argued, that our very understanding of the Indian political system depends upon our assessment of patterns of political development within the constituent states.

The significant development in the 1990s has been the central position, that the states in the Indian Union have come to occupy in national politics. Today, with the ending of the 'Congress system' and trends towards regionalisation¹ of Indian politics having become more manifest, states have become increasingly important, and powerful, enjoying much greater autonomy from the Centre. Due to the rise of strong regional parties, they are partners in national governance, having greater financial freedom, and following liberalisation can independently enter into negotiation with foreign countries for technological collaboration, and aid. New social identities, and groups in the states have asserted themselves, changing the established counters of state party systems, leading to a fresh political alignments in every national election. The changes taking place in the states are of paramount significance, as this is the arena

1. The is coupled with 'federalisation' whereby national parties get limited to certain regions and states, and different state party systems have emerged or emerging, that has made state political arena more competitive, See Manor, James : "Regional Parties in Federal System: India in Comparative perspective" in Balveer Arora and Douglas Verney (eds.): *Multiple Identities in a Single State: Indian Federalism in Comparative Perspective*, (Kornark, New Delhi, 1995), pp. 103-135.

in which changes in the Indian polity have manifested themselves in recent years, and these are feeding into national patterns to a much greater extent than ever before¹.

This broad picture of political change, however embodies a wealth to diverse coalition setting and experiences. Indeed, it is a microcosm of the conditions vogue in a variety of sub-political system dependent on coalition politics for the performance of the functions of government. This provide an abundant opportunity for the examination of a broad spectrum of generalisations. With this purpose selected Indian states are being compared, with the aim of answering the following questions: Why do the patterns of order and breakdown of coalitions differ? What does the comparative study of these differences tell us about the nature of nature of coalition politics in the states in the 1990s.

Three states will be analysed : U.P. and Maharashtra have both experienced considerable violence and instability over the past decade. U.P. is one of India's poorest states. Maharashtra, by contrast is country's one of the richest. Comparative analysis of U.P. and Maharashtra will enable us not only to distinguish between patterns of coalition breakdown, but also to delineate the common factors that lie behind those patterns. Both U.P. and Maharashtra will then be juxtaposed against West Bengal, a state that appears to have been relatively free of caste, class and communal violence, major riots, and government instability during the 1990s. The issue of how and why political order has been restored and sustained (after the decade of chaos, 1967-77) – is important in its own right. When analysed comparatively, however, it may also shed light on this study's central question : What factors have contributed to India's growing problems of coalition politics ?

1. I. Narain and P.C.Mathur : *Politics in Changing India* (N.Delhi, Rawat, 1994), p.6.

Since 1989, there have been more than nineteen different coalition governments in the states. Selecting three states for analysis in this study has been guided by the aim of projecting the synoptically diverse and distinct band of coalition spectrum, in terms of the number of political parties involved, with ideologically like-mindedness or otherwise and the tendency for parties to aggregate themselves into grand coalitions, or into minimal winning coalitions.

It is important to note at the outset that what follows is not a detailed study of coalition politics in three of India's state. Each of these is a large and complex political unity. A detailed political analysis of these states would have to cover many more themes than discussed here. What follows is primarily a comparative interpretation of state-level observations and evidences around a single theme, namely, the factors which help to explain the relative degree of order and breakdown of coalitions at state level in the 1990s.

(A) **COALITION EXPERIMENTS IN ETHNIFICATIONAL POLITICS : UTTAR PRADESH**

Seen from the vantage point of the year 1999, coalition politics in U.P. in post-Congress phase, is characterised by two transformations : the 'second democratic upsurge' and the 'ethnification of state-politics'. While the latter refers to the emergence of a politics in which all major parties make open appeals to ethnic identity central to their political games, the former refers to the dramatic surge in participation in the political process by members of subordinate social groups.¹ This

1. For studies on the 'second democratic upsurge', see Yogendra Yadav : "Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Election, 1993-95", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Vol. XXXI, No. 2 and 3, January 13-20, 1996), p.p. 95-104; and 'The Idea of Democracy', *Seminar* (461, January 1998), pp. 58-61.

study focuses attention on the second of the two transformations. That increasing numbers of previously marginalised groups are beginning to enter the political arena is significant. Equally important, however, is an understanding of the terms on which they are being inducted. The fact that the 'second democratic upsurge' is being channelled for the first time in U.P. through an ethnic politics has profound consequences for coalition-building in U.P. and other states witnessing a similar phenomenon in the wake of widespread Congress decline.

The term 'ethnicity' has been used here to imply nominal membership in an ascriptive category including race, language, caste, religion or region. Membership in an ethnic category is inherited: an individual in U.P., for example, might be born as a Muslim Teli from Rohilkhand; a Shilpkar from Kumaon; or a Brahmin from Poorvanchal. However, as examples illustrate, we are usually born with nominal membership in multiple categories. The term 'ethnification' as defined here refers to a discursive shift in the political arena from the covert to the overt use of ethnic identities in political processes by all major political parties.

The beginnings of this transformation can be traced to 1989, when the vote share of the Congress plunged almost 20% points to 31.8% in the parliamentary elections and it lost controls of the state government. This marked the starting of the precipitous decline of the party that have been governing the state for most of the post-independence period, and with only 6% of the vote in 1999, it has virtually disappeared from the political arena. 1989 is also the turning point in the history of successor parties. The BJP surged ahead between 1989 and 1991, and has since become the single largest party in U.P. It won 33% of vote in the 1999 election. The Janata Dal, newly created in 1989,

obtained majority of parliamentary seats and plurality of seats in the state legislative assembly in the 1989 election. The Samajwadi Party was born in 1992 out of a series of splinters in the JD. It won 29% of the vote in the 1999 election and is now the second largest party. The BJP, created in 1984, also obtained a burst of support in 1989. With 21% of the vote in 1999, it is now the third force in U.P. politics.

The key aspect of the replacement of the Congress by the BJP, the SP, and the BSP, is not a replacement of a 'non-ethnic' party with a collection of 'ethnic' parties, since the Congress has also invoked ethnic identities in its political games in the past, especially at the local level. Nor is it, as is usually understood, the replacement of a single multi-ethnic party with a collection of 'mono-ethnic' parties. The three successor parties are all multi-ethnic, although the coalitions they seek to build are narrow than those build by the Congress : the BJP seeks to weld together all Hindu castes, while the SP and the BSP seek to build a coalition of subordinate Hindu castes and Muslims. Rather, the key aspect is a change in the *type* of ethnic politics that dominates the coalition arena. The Congress has typically blended coded appeals to ethnic identity with a range of other issues. The three successor parties, however, make open appeals to ethnicity the centre piece of their political *modes-operendi*. It is this change in a dominant type of ethnic politics that has reference to 'ethnification'. Now, follows the comparison of the manners in which the four parties invoked ethnicity throughout 1990s in their political manoeuvres, tracing the evolution in their use of ethnic categories since 1989¹.

1. The analysis is heavily indebted to a reading of Gyanendra Pandey : *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi : O.U.P., 1992)

(I) THE CONGRESS PARTY

On 14 November, 1997, amid rumours of an impending general election, the Congress announced an ambitious series of program designed to revive itself in U.P. The inaugural event was a rally held in Allahabad at Anand Bhawan, Nehru's ancestral home. Analysed here is the manner in which the Congress invoked ethnic identity in the proceedings of the rally, which is an excellent example of vintage Congress strategy in U.P.¹ This analysis forms the background for comparison with the other parties who replaced the Congress in U.P. in the 1990s.

The three speakers given star billing at the rally were the former U.P.C.C. President, Mr. N.D. Tiwari,² and Sushri Meira Kumar and Mr. Tariq Anwar, both national secretaries of the party. In their speeches, all three speakers constructed the electorate not as a collection of ethnic blocks, but as an amorphous mass of individuals. They alternated between addressing this mass as the whole and addressing particular groups within it. Groups were defined, however, by employing a range of categories – ethnic and non-ethnic – and the lines of distinction were constantly redrawn so that no group, no matter how it was defined, assumed fixed boundaries. Meira Kumar's speech offers one illustration of these prepositions. Sushri Kumar began by invoking a common-sense of nationhood, and depicting the Congress as a party of all individual who made up the nation. Almost, immediately, she launched into a description

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1. All information and quotations from this rally are taken from my notes and recording of the proceedings. For a brief report of the rally, see *Pioneer*, Nov. 15, 1997. It would be more appropriate here to analyse a rally organised for Sonia Gandhi, who later became the star campaigner of the party. I was unable, however, to obtain a full text of any of the Sonia Gandhi's speeches. Extracts from her speeches printed in news reports indicate, however, that she did not depart from the basic Congress strategy employed by Meira Kumar and others.
 2. Tiwari resigned following the election results and was replaced on July 4, 1998 by Salman Khursheed, *The Times of India* (March 4, 1998); *India Today* (July 29, 1998)

of the nation as divided between rich and poor: "He who has abundance of grain also feels hunger and he who has no grain also feels hungry. If both feel hunger equally, then the grain should be shared equally. The difference between rich and poor should end". A moment later, she replaced income with caste as the organising category : "This society is not only divided into rich and poor, it is fragmented along caste lines and until we end caste difference, we will not be able to free our people." Caste was quickly followed by religion: "These days parties are using slogans of religion. I want to ask them why are you inciting the people against each other ... this religion against that religion". And the description of the nation as composed of a collection of religious groups gave way to the juxtaposition of Scheduled Caste against an undefined 'mainstream'. At the end of the speech, the political community had been classified in at least four different ways : (a) rich+poor; (b) as a collection of castes; (c) Hindu+Muslim+Sikh; and (d) Schedule Caste+mainstream. Each classification was superimposed on a background that presumed a collection of individuals bound by some unifying tie. And while these individuals were successively viewed through a collection of frames, ethnic and non-ethnic, no single frame acquired dominant or permanent status.

Through out the 1990s, political issues raised by the Congress, similarly, did not privilege ethnic identity.¹ The only overt attempt was Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's apologies for the storming of the Golden Temple and the demolition of Babri Masjid. The other issue that were raised, promised 'a secular state', 'all round development', 'national unity', 'law and order',

1. For description of Congress election campaigns in U.P. in various elections in 1990s, see reports starting from Amethi (*The Hindustan Times*, April 2, 1991); Merrut and Mohanlal Ganj (*The Hindu*, Aug. 9, 1993); Mathura (*The Times of India*, Aug 14., 1993); Muzaffarnagar and Ghaziabad (*Danik Jagran*, Oct. 7, 1996); Rai Bareli (*The Hindu*, Feb. 15, 1998); and Sitapur (*The Times of India*, September 18, 1999). This provides a synoptic view of the party's political perception of the state politics.

and 'stability' – all promises targeted at an undifferentiated electorate.

Although Congress followed the policy of not overtly invoking ethnic identity in the political arena, it would be, however, a naivety to assume that it was not employed at all. At the aforementioned Congress revival rally, for example, the official positions of the three star speakers were not their sole qualifications. Mr. Tiwari was a Brahmin Meira Kumar, a Schedule Caste, and Mr. Tariq Anwar a Muslim. Through its projection of leaders, Congress was in time honoured fashion sending out a coded message to the three ethnic categories that have been its traditional supporters in U.P.¹ Significantly, however, none of them portrayed themselves, as leaders of an imagined ethnic community or call explicitly for political action based on ethnic identity.

In addition to ethnic 'codes', the Congress has traditionally relied on ethnic arithmetic at the local level.² In each constituency, furthermore, the Congress candidate targets some categories and ignores other. However, differentiated ethnic coalitions are targeted across constituencies so that no single category is uniformly excluded and the Congress is not aligned with any particular ethnic block at the aggregate level. Members of particulars ethnic categories at the local level, furthermore,

1. One example of a 'coded' appeal is the Congress invocation of threats to national integrity in the 1984 elections, which were thinly veiled attempts to stoke the anxiety of Hindu majority. Another is Rajiv Gandhi's promise to establish 'Ram Rajya' in 1989 election campaign, widely interpreted as a signal aligning the Congress with the Hindu 'majority'.

2. For examples of local calculations based on ethnic arithmetic, see Myron Wiener : *Party Building in New Nation* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1967); Harold Gould : *Grassroots politics in India : A Century of Political Evolution in Faizabad District* (New Delhi : Oxford and IBM Publishing Co. 1994).

have in the past have been incorporated into the Congress through multi-ethnic factions.¹ Since they are brought in through vertical linkages with the members of dominant groups, members of these newly mobilised ethnic categories have rarely assumed a cohesive political identity within the Congress.

By defining electorate in multiple ways, avoiding overt references to ethnic identity in the political arena and deflecting ethnic mobilisation at the local level through multi-ethnic factions, the Congress strategy kept the boundaries between ethnic groups soft and prevented the formation of the blocks at the aggregate levels of region and state. Although in the 1990s political terrain of U.P. has dramatically changed, this strategy of the Congress remained unchanged, and so by 1998, it no longer had any followers. The rally at Allahabad attracted less than a thousand people, most of whom were not supporters, but passer-by attending to their own business. By 1998, the majority of the upper castes had left the Congress for the BJP; Muslims for the SP, and the Schedule Castes for the BSP.² Though in 1999 election, the Congress has marked improvement,³ its unique

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1. See Paul Brass : *Factional Politics in an Indian State* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1965), "Coalition politics in North India", *American Political Science Review* (XII, 4, December 1968); Rajni Kothari : "The Congress System in India"; *Asian Survey*, (Vol. 4, No. 12, 1964): pp. 1161-73; and Wiener, *Party Building in a New Nation* (University of Chicago Press, 1967)
 2. For ethnic profile of the support base of the Congress in 1990s, see Yogendra Yadav : "Reconfiguration of Indian Politics: State Assembly Election 1993-95", *EPW*, (June, 13-20), 1996; Kanchan Chandra and Chandrika Parmar : "Party Strategies in U.P. Assembly Election 1996", *EPW*, (Vol. XXXII, No. 5, 1997), pp. 214-22 ; "Electoral Analysis : Patterns and Pointers : Verdict", *Frontline*, (Sept. 12, 1998); "A state-wise verdict of 1999", *Frontline*, (5 Nov. 1999).
 3. In contrast to 1998 Congress improved its positions from zero to ten sheets, with certain shifts of Brahmin votes evident in Kanpur, Shajahanpur, Rampur and Rai Bareilly. The Congress's alliance partner, Ajit Singh led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), bagged two seats-Baghpat and Kairan- from western U.P., propelling Muslims to desert the S.P.. Behind this was a consolidation of Jats and Gujjars votes of Congress alliance as evident from votes polled by the SP in Meerut, where its candidate ended up with 13050 votes in comparison to 2,70,363 he had in 1998.

brand of 'ethnic rainbow' coalition politics is decisively no longer referential point in U.P., today.

(II) THE BHARTIYA JANATA PARTY

The principal gainer in U.P. at the cost of the Congress is the BJP, which has won a majority of seats in the parliamentary elections in U.P. since 1991 (although not a majority of vote). In the 1998 election, the party inched forward slightly compared to its position in the previous Lok Sabha election, increasing its votes from 33.4% to 35.8% and acquired substantial support base throughout the state (being leading party in five out of six regions), though in 1999 election, it slumped from its 1998 best of 60 seats with 57 for the BJP alone, to the alliance ending up with 32 seats with BJP's 29 in it.

The rise of the BJP in U.P. occurred between 1989 and 1991 when it marketed itself openly as a pro-Hindu party. The party's militancy in support of the imagined Hindu majority continued until December 1992, when the Babri mosque at Ayodhya was destroyed by its supporters. Since then the party has been progressively moderating its position, promoting speculation that it has slowly being transformed in to a Congress 'clone'.¹ However, although the BJP has in many ways attempted to mould itself in the centrist image of the Congress, it remains fundamentally distinct, and whatever similarities are there between both the parties, they only emphasise their limit and nothing else.

The moderation of the BJP is best illustrated through the silences in campaign speeches, and the party no longer aligned itself with the 'Hindu majority', Rather, it attempted to invoke a

1. For one example of an editorial treating the BJP as essentially indistinguishable from Congress, See *Pioneer* (January 31, 1995).

vaguely defined nationalism, denuded of its Hindu content.¹ Speaking at an election rally in Saharanpur in 1998, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee declared: "Every inch of this land is dear to us. We have come to ask your support so that the dream of making Bharat great might be realised."² In 1990, practically identical words, uttered by Mr. L.K. Advani during the BJP's Rath Yatra and preceded by descriptions of 'Bharat' as a holy land, immediately infused the word 'nation' with the Hindu content. In 1998, uttered by Mr. Vajpayee, who is widely regarded as a moderator and separated from any overt association with Hindu religious or cultural symbols, they became a standard invocation of an inclusive nationalism, indistinguishable from that of Congress. Like the Congress, the BJP addressed the 'nation' as a collection of individuals, intermittently organised into groups (Dalits, farmers, Muslims). And like the Congress, it made a concerted effort to portray itself as an umbrella party, standing above all groups and sheltering the symbols and aspirations of each. As Mr. Vajpayee put it : "We need to take care of everyone, take everyone along with us. When the Congress people come, they only talk of Gandhiji. When the BSP people come, they talk only of Ambedkar. We are the only ones who talk of Gandhi and Ambedkar, honour them both, think of both as important".³

1. See Christophe Jaffrelot: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (London : Viking, 1993), Chapter 14 and the conclusion for the dilution of the BJP's strategy in U.P. in the 1993 assembly election. For a study of its strategy in the 1996 assembly election, see Paul Brass: "General Election, 1996 in U.P." *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. XXXII No. 38, September 20); and Chandra and Parmar: "Party Strategies" Taken together, these works depict steady trend in dilution of several aspect of the BJP's pro-Hindu stance.

2. BJP rally, Saharanpur, February 14, 1998.

3. Ibid.

The campaign issues raised by the BJP were also indistinguishable from the issues traditionally raised by the Congress. Barring isolated exceptions, the party from 1996 onward started focussing on the issues of stability, good governance, and capable leadership, designed to appeal to the nation as a whole rather than Hindus in particular. Political instability was portrayed as the single most important threat facing the country, and the BJP under the leadership of Mr. Vajpayee as the party most capable of providing stability.¹ However, arguments based on these considerable similarities of the BJP and the Congress, miss the fact that although the BJP has moderated its pro-Hindu rhetoric, it has made no parallel efforts to attract Muslims' support given to the Muslims in the 1999 campaign, reveal that they contain mainly the minimal guarantees of security that the party has always extended, even at the height of pro-Hindu rhetoric in 1991.² What has changed in the BJP's attitude towards Muslims between 1991 and 1999 is simply that the party no longer identifies Muslims as a target for hostility. While Muslims are no longer its target enemies, however, it does not follow that they are the party's target voters.³

It is a political common sense in U.P. that in order to attract the votes of any ethnic category, a political party must

1. For example, see Mr. Vajpayee's speech at Allahabad, reported in *The Hindustan Times* (23 August, 1999)

2. For example of BJP's guarantees to Muslims of U.P. during the 1999 campaign, see Advani's speech in Ayodhya, reported in *The Hindu*, (September 7, 1999), where he says that the BJP's commitment to Ayodhya is not directed against the Muslims; and Vajpayee's assurances in Lucknow, that the BJP would safeguard the security of Muslims, *Pioneer*, (September 18, 1999)

3. A look at the number of tickets given to Muslims in U.P. by the BJP offers persuasive evidence. Since 1989, the party has given at most one ticket to a Muslims candidate in the 1991, 1993 and 1996 assembly elections. In all other election (the parliamentary elections of the 1989, 1991 and 1996) not a single ticket was allotted. In 1998 and 1999 parliamentary election, only one ticket were given.

nominate at least some candidates from that category. A party that habitually gives only one ticket to a Muslim candidate is not a party desperately seeking to woo the crucial 'Muslim vote'. Rather, it is party that has chosen to stake its electoral future only on Hindus, uniformly excluding Muslims from its effective electorate. Then, we should interpret the limited overtures that the BJP has been making to Muslims, and the toning down of its pro-Hindu rhetoric, at best, as a signal to Hindu voters, themselves divided over the treatment of Muslims in India, and to potential alliance partners who might not have found an alliance with an anti-Muslim party palatable or politically profitable.

The principle target of the BJP's strategy in U.P. since 1993 seem not to have been Muslims, but the backward castes and scheduled castes. As indicated above, the BJP's core group of voters come from among the upper castes, the overwhelming majority of whom had massed behind the BJP by 1996.¹ Following the Ram Temple movement, the BJP has built some support among backwards and schedule castes, but it remained considerably weaker among both these categories. Only 32.7% of backward castes and 8.6 % of the schedule castes voted for the party in 1996 elections.² In the ethnically heterogeneous constituencies of the state even the *enmasse* support of the upper castes is typically not sufficient to produce a coalition victory. In a four way competition, for example the minimum threshold of votes that any one party needs to win is slightly over one fourth of the total votes cast. In a three way competition the votes must exceed at least one-third of the total votes cast. In a two way competition, the votes exceed one- half. Upper caste constitute approximately one-fifth of the state electorate as a

1. Chandra & Parmar : *Party Strategies*.

2. Calculated from table 3 in Chandra and Parmar, *Ibid*.

whole and do not exceed this portion in most constituencies. Even with the support of the majority of the upper caste a considerable additional margin of votes is needed in order to win. The Congress has constructed wide winning margin in U.P. by building an electoral coalition out of both Hindus and Muslims. So far the BJP is attempting to replace the shortfall created by its alienation of Muslim voters by pursuing support of backward castes and schedule castes.

The BJP has attempted to count backward castes mainly by inserting their representation in its candidate lists and cabinets. However, resistance from its upper caste core has meant that such increases so far have been modest : backward caste BJP MLAs jumped from plateau of 16% between 1989 and 1993 to 21% in 1998. While backward castes' minister in BJP council of ministers jumped from 21% in 1991 to 27% in 1999. It attempted to boost its credibility among scheduled castes in particular, through its support of BSP-led governments in 1995 and 1997. So far, however, it has chosen not to utilise caste explicitly as an organising category that further subdivides the Hindu 'majority'. Nor has it attempted to weld caste categories together into a homogenous Hindu 'majority' as it did earlier in the decade. This strategy appears to have enabled the BJP to preserve its base but not to expand it: its share of votes over the five parliamentary and assembly elections held in U.P. between 1991 and 1998 remained at the plateau of approximately one-third of the votes, which while has enabled it to win majority of parliamentary constituencies, it has not able to produce a governing majority in the state assembly elections.

In order to obtain a winning margin in U.P., the BJP must either increase its support base among members of the backward and scheduled castes, or begin to count the support of the Muslims. So, far it has mainly relied on the first, that includes two main options : the first is the more substantial incorporation

of backward castes into the party in U.P., where it is locked in fierce competition for their support with the SP and BSP, both of which are pursuing backward castes by explicit promising them a share in power in proportion to their population. Given the existing terms of electoral debate, the BJP is likely to be able to wean them away from the SP and BSP only by 'outbidding' them in promises of increased representation. Several BJP leaders, including Mr. K.N. Govindacharya, one of the general secretaries of the party, has suggested that. However, such proposals continue to meet with significant resistance within the party. The second option is to change the terms of debate and revert to the aggressive espousal of Hindu nationalism that initially brought the BJP to power. This strategy seemed to have found little favour within the party in the 1999 election, but has periodically resurfaced in the party's history and should not be ruled out in the future.

(III) THE BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY

Where the BJP draws a line between the Muslims minority and Hindu majority, the BSP draws a cross-cutting line between a different kind of minority (*alpjan*) and majority (*bahujan*). The former, in this formulation, consists of upper Hindu castes, while the latter consists of ÓBCs and SCs STs, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, or in other words, 'all those not included in the three Hindu upper castes'.¹ The cleavage between caste Hindus and the rest of the society is for the BSP the primary cleavage, dividing the political community. The party describes the 'bahujan samaj' (majority of the people), which is estimated to form 85% of the population, as a community of all those 'humiliated' by the Hindu upper castes. The belief that the upper castes are an oppressive minority ruling over an oppressed majority is the keystone of the BSP's ideology.

1. Interview with BSP worker, Lucknow, April, 2000

Like the BJP, the BSP is fundamentally different from the Congress. For the BSP, the political community is constituted by groups, not individuals, who have fixed, not fluctuating boundaries. And whereas the Congress defines groups by several ascriptive and non-ascriptive criteria, the BSP treats ascriptive identity as the sole classifying criterion. For example, although there is a significant overlap between those who are poor and those whom the BSP includes within the *bahujan samaj*, the party rarely speaks of the undifferentiated poor. Rather it treats poverty as an attribute associated with certain ethnic categories, but not an organising category in itself.

Although, the BSP treats the boundaries between the *ajpjan* and *bahujan* and their constituent categories as fixed, the party has progressively recognised sub-division *within* each of these categories. In 1984, for example, when the BSP was founded, it treated the OBCs as listed in the Mandal Commission Report as a single undifferentiated category. By the mid of the 'nineties', however, the party had begun to draw classification between the 'backward' castes and the 'most backward' castes. Both categories, in turn were subdivided into a collection of component castes.

The term 'most backward castes' refers in the BSP's categorisation not to an official classification, but to all those among the backward castes who are not Yadavas, Kurmis, or Lodhs, which implies Sainis, Prajapati, and Pals. There is nothing in the logic of the BSP's position, however, that would prevent it from recognising further divisions. It is important to point out that BSP continues to employ only ascriptive criteria in its identification of sub-division within each main category.

Other possible means of differentiating within ethnic categories (class, gender, occupation, sector) are not acknowledged as relevant.

Throughout the 1990s, the BSP consistently appealed to its target ethnic categories (most backward caste and schedule castes – Chamar, Jatav, Pasi, Kori, Dhobi etc.) with a single point programme : proportional representation for every ethnic category in the government, bureaucracy and other state institutions. “Political power”, according to Mr. Kanshi Ram, the party’s founder, “is the master key with which you can open any lock, whether it is social, economic, educational and cultural...”¹ Accordingly, the BSP devotes most of its political moves to detailing the opportunities it makes available to each ethnic category to obtain a share in government.²

Due to the favourable effects of this strategy, by 1996, the majority of SCs had already massed behind the BSP, and Ms. Mayawati’s remarks that “the votes of the Dalit Shoshit Samaj will be cast for Muslims in any case”³, indicates that the BSP was relatively confident in its ability to retain SC votes. Whereas in the 1996 assembly election, SCs were allotted the greatest share of BSP tickets (30%), their share dropped to 25% in the 1998 parliamentary election.⁴ And the primary targets of the BSP by 1999 election were the BCs, to whom 41% of tickets were

1. Ambeth Rajan : *My Bahujan Samaj Party* (New Delhi : ABCDE Publication, 1994), p. 32

2. BSP election rally, Saharanpur, February 14, 1998.

3. BSP election rally, Allahabad, August 7, 1996.

4. For a caste profile of BSP candidates in the 1996 assembly election, see Chandra and Parmar : *Party Strategies*. For the 1998 and 1999 parliamentary elections, the caste profile is taken from Mayawati’s speech and corroborated through records at the BSP party office, Lucknow.

given, an increase of more than 10% over the 1996 assembly election. Among them, the party favoured the 'most backward castes', who obtained 66% of the tickets given to BCs. In addition, BSP, continued to seek support of Muslims, allotting them roughly same percentage of tickets (16%) that it had in the 1996 assembly elections, and in addition, circulated a separate booklet describing the BSP's commitment to Muslim interests.

Finally, the BSP increased its efforts to reach to upper castes, which it had done in the 1996 parliamentary election. Prior to that, the BSP mobilised the bahun by polarising the electorate against the upper castes. The promise of political representation was packaged within a narrative of a collective humiliation of the bahun samaj at the hands of upper caste Hindus. Obtaining political power, in the early history of the BSP in U.P. was described mainly as a means of avenging humiliation by displacing the upper castes from their superior position. Until as late as 1993, where the BSP first surged to power in U.P. with an alliance of Samajwadi Party, the then BSP State president, Mr. Raj Bahadur, directed his voters not to vote for upper castes, and to make sure that the upper caste candidates, even those put by its alliance partners, were defeated.¹ In the 1996 Lok Sabha election, however, the BSP allotted tickets to upper caste candidates for the first time in U.P. In 1996 Vidhan Sabha election, approximately 17% of the BSP tickets went to upper caste candidates.² In 1998, the party not only allotted the same percentage of tickets to upper caste candidates, but also made their induction in the BSP a major election issue. And, in 1999 lauding the upper castes for their 'change of heart', Mayawati

1. *Pioneer*, 2 October 29, 1993.

2. Chandra and Parmar, *Ibid*.

declared the BSP to be a party of *Sarvasamaj* (all people), and not simply the Bahujan Samaj in her election speeches.¹

It is tempting to interpret the BSP's attempt to incorporate upper castes, like the moderation of the BJP, as the transformation of the party into a benign 'catch all party' identical to the Congress.² Such an interpretation, however, is misleading and premature, because the incorporation of upper castes has aroused fierce resistance among the core of SC workers in the party, who resent being forced to work for an upper caste candidate, and it is not yet clear to what extent it is likely to endure.³ In an interview in March 1997, Mr. Kanshi Ram freely admitted that he had difficulty in obtaining the co-operation of his workers in the induction of upper caste candidates. In U.P., according to him, the party organisation was disciplined enough to accept his directives. However, he pointed out that he could not do the same thing in any other state.⁴ Even in U.P., however, he finally appeared to back down in the face of this resistance, and announced before the 1998 election that the BSP would no longer open its doors to upper castes.⁵ The announcement was later denied by Ms. Mayawati on his behalf. While her intervention may have resulted in reappearance of upper caste candidates in the party's candidate list, the events preceding it indicate that the incorporation of upper castes into the party remains a fragile process, vulnerable to summary reversal.

1. BSP election rallies in Gonda, September 4, 1999, Sitapur, 6 September, 1999.

2. See editorials in *The Times of India* (July 3, 1996 and September 28, 1996) for analyses to this effect.

3. This is based on separate interviews with upper caste candidates and BSP workers in Lucknow in April, 2000

4. Interview of Kanshi Ram, Shehdol (M.P.), *The Hindu*. (March 15, 1997).

5. The announcement must have been in response to the defection of upper caste MLAs from the BSP to the BJP government in 1997.

The method through which the BSP incorporates upper castes, further more, is distinct from that of the Congress. The party not only allots tickets to upper caste candidates as representatives of a state-wide ethnic block, it also relies on highly segmented methods of building support, so that members of each ethnic category are encouraged to approach only others of their kind, but not to build cross ethnic support. The BSP encourages members of each category to maintain separate corporate identities, while at the same time, it attempts to build coalitions between them.¹ By incorporating upper castes, thus, all the party does it to effectively abolish the primary distinction that it draws between upper castes and the rest. However, upper castes continue to be encased within the hard ethnic boundaries, that separate members of each ethnic category from others.

Once again, the heterogeneous composition of U.P.'s electoral constituencies has forced the BSP to supplement its traditional vote base with upper caste votes, despite of serious internal resistance. The SCs, who form the core of the party's support, are not strong enough in any constituency to its victory.² The central dilemma for the BSP, as for every other party in U.P., therefore, has been to find ways of supplementing its core vote sufficiently to permit it to win electoral victories. Until 1993, the BSP attempted to find its coveted margin by excluding upper castes and mobilising only its ideologically favoured constituencies : Muslims and backward castes.

1. In an interview, televised on Star News Channel, a Brahmin candidate from the BSP during the 1998 parliamentary election, described the BSP's method; 'The party has advised me that the scheduled castes will collect the votes of the scheduled castes, and we higher castes will collect the votes of the higher castes. On strategy is that our SC brothers are here to convince SCs, Yadav to convince Yadavas and Kurmis to convince Kurmis'.

2. See Chandra and Farmer : *Party Strategies*, for the ethnic profile of BSP support in the 1996 Lok Sabha Election.

However, since the BSP's first flirtation with the BJP in U.P. in 1995, its credibility among Muslims has been suspect. In 1996, it managed to attract negligible 4.7% of the Muslim votes.¹ In 1998 election, given that the BSP once more collaborated with the BJP in forming a government, its prospect of improving its performance among Muslims was shattered. Though, backward castes have been more responsive to the party's appeal, the party faces fierce battle for their support with the SP and BJP. In fact, 1999 Lok Sabha elections demonstrated that the BSP is unlikely, in a single election to obtain their strong support that might guarantee a winning margin, as the SP's backward caste base stood steady with their 87.3% votes for the party.

The BSP, therefore, faced two main options to boost its chances of winning by the end of 1990s: an alliance with the SP, which would allow both parties to pool their support; or an attempt to court the party's ideological enemies—the upper castes. The first option even actualised in 1993, and there were visible mutual gains for both sides, but that alliance foundered on two rocks: personal animosity between Ms. Mayawati and Mr. Mulami Singh Yadav, and more importantly, a concern for relative rather than mutual gains. The BSP leaders calculated that the gains in the number of seats that the party might have won through an alliance in subsequent assembly election of 1996 weighed less than the cost of boosting the credibility of the SP among their common target constituencies.² After this, the

1. Chandra and Parmar, *Ibid.*

2. However, in situations where cooperation with the SP doesn't immediately threaten her vote base, Mayawati has been willing to cooperate with the SP; for e.g. in orchestrating the dismissal of the BJP government in February 1998.

BSP had no option but to pursue votes on all fronts, including the upper castes.

Several observers argue that the explanation why the BSP-SP alliance did not succeed goes deeper than the calculus of gains and losses. It lies, according to this argument, in a pattern of land ownership and cultivation which pits SCs against sections of the BCs especially Yadavas and Kurmis. The upper castes in U.P. are largely absentee landlords who no longer come directly into contact with the SCs. Instead Yadavas and Kurmis, who emerged as landowners after the land reforms, have replaced upper castes as the main 'tormentors' of the SCs.¹

This argument ignores, however, that the relationship of SCs with the upper castes in much of U.P. is also fraught with tensions. In a total of 54 incidents of caste violence reported in the first three months of the SP-BSP government in 1993-1994, for example, BCs and SCs clashed with each other in 21, but upper castes and SCs also clashed with each other in 13.² Such polarisation in caste relations between SCs and upper castes did not prevent the BSP from seeking a political alliance with the BJP and upper castes. There is no reason, therefore, to assume that it poses an insurmountable obstacle to a political rapprochement between the SCs and the BCs.

In the light of the argument so far, one further question needs to be addressed : if the electoral incentives of heterogeneous constituencies forced the BSP to abolish the primary distinction between the Bahujan Samaj and upper caste

1. See, for example Saibal Das Gupta : "The Mulayam Touch", *The Times of India* (January 3, 1993).

2. *The Indian Express*, February 15, 1994. The article itself overestimates the number of violent clashes between OBC and SCs at a higher level. However, it is accompanied by a list of incidents on the basis of which I have revised the published estimate.

Hindus, why did similar incentives not lead the BJP to erase the distinction between Hindus and Muslims in its own electoral strategy? The answer is that the BJP has so far faced weaker incentives and stronger constraints in its incorporation of Muslims than the BSP has in its incorporation of upper castes. Prior to the 1998 election, the BJP had already acquired the support of a third of the BCs. It had also boosted its image among SCs through its support of the BSP governments. The BJP, therefore, approached the 1998 election with a larger electoral coalition than the BSP and thus had a weaker incentives to appeal to Muslim voters. At the same time, the BJP faces stronger ideological constraints against the incorporation of Muslims than the BSP does against the incorporation of upper castes. The BSP is a highly centralised party, whose principal ideologue, Mr. Kanshi Ram, also remains its patriarchal leader. It was born out of BAMCEF, an organisation of government employees trained by Kanshi Ram and his close associates, which provided the early cadre base of the party. Until its association with the BSP, BAMCEF functioned as an ideological watchdog, and a challenge to Mr. Kanshi Ram's authority, but after their split in 1985, there remains only emotional opposition to the entry of upper castes but no significant ideological challenge to the *dictat* of Mr. Kanshi Ram. The BJP, however, continues to be heavily constrained by its relationship with the Hindu nationalist-RSS, which continues to be its ideological overseer, and exercises its influence through the presence of full time members (*pracharaks*) in key nodes of the BJP's organisation.

Even though it attempted to court votes on all fronts in 1998, the BSP was unable to elevate itself to a winning position in U.P. Although, it retained a basic share of 20% of the votes,

the number of seats it won in U.P. dropped from 6 to 4. The BSP, today, is not in a winning position in any region of U.P. Even in Bundelkhand, where it has more support than any other region, it is short of one-third threshold needed to win in a three way competition. As the main battles in the 1999 Lok Sabha election have been between the SP and the BJP in five out of six regions, and between the BJP and the Congress in Uttarakhand, with the BSP emerging as a third force in every region in the state.

(IV) THE SAMAJWADI PARTY

The SP, formed in 1992 out of a series of splits from the Janata Dal, employs two principal categories in classifying the electorate : religion and caste. The SP organises the electorate as a composite of two insular religious 'communities': a Muslim 'minority', and a Hindu 'majority'. Both are then further disaggregated by caste. The SP gives more emphasis than the BJP, and the BSP on non-ethnic categories, describing itself also as a party of farmers, of the poor, of the youth, or of rural India. However, where they are not subordinated to the ethnic categories, they are given only secondary emphasis.

Let us first illustrate the use of 'religious identity' as the primary classification employed by the SP. At an election rally in Saharanpur during the 1998 election campaign a SP leader offered the following description of the nation : "Hindustan is a very great land. Our Hindu brothers are our elder brothers. We Muslims are the younger brothers. It is all right with us, if they rule this country, in fact we want them to rule. We are not worried. But our elder brothers should fulfil their duty. We are in need of a Hindu brother like Mulayam Singh Yadav, who gave us the care due to a younger brother". The nation in this description

is composed of two corporate units—Hindu and Muslim; both treated as internally homogenous communities, reducible in effect to single individuals—‘the Hindu’ and ‘the Muslim’. Furthermore, the divide between them is treated as the primary cleavage in society eclipsing all other differences. Speaking, later at the same rally, Mr. Yadav, repeatedly invoked the same image. Each campaign issue was raised as a matter to be evaluated by both communities acting cohesively, with him positioning himself as an arbiter between two separate and internally homogenous set of interests. There was no acknowledgement in Mr. Yadav’s rhetoric of differences of opinions within the two groups, or of clusters of opinion on the uniform civil code cross-cutting the religious divide. Even the issue of poverty and hunger were presented as ethnically specific, separately and individually experienced by the two communities.¹

While maintaining the primary division between ‘the Hindu’ and ‘the Muslim’, the SP frequently switches its attention to caste divisions among both. The party initially highlighted only aggregate caste divisions among ‘Hindu’, ‘forward castes’, ‘backward castes’ and ‘scheduled castes’. By 1998, however, it began to press deeper into caste subdivisions within the BCs among both Hindus and Muslims, and to a lesser extent, the Hindu ‘forward castes’. The SP’s classification of the political community combines elements of both the BJP and the BSP’s schemes for classifying the electorate : the BJP also maintains a clear line between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority,

1. See the text of Mulayam Singh Yadav’s speech at the SP election rally in Saharanpur, 1998.

although it does not, like the SP, explicitly acknowledge subdivisions among either. The BSP would not recognise the line between Hindus and Muslims as the primary division defining the political community. However, the SP's description of both communities as a collection of caste aggregate categories, that are intrinsically a collection of individual castes is, in fact, an attempt to emulate the BSP's strategy.

The roots of the more detailed picture of caste divisions can be traced to a major backward classes rally organised by the SP at Lucknow in December 1996.¹ Attended by every significant leader of the party, and intended as the first of a series of training programmes to prepare party workers for the next election, the rally grounds were plastered with banners offering support to the SP on behalf of individual castes that form hardly 1 or 2 percent of the state's population: the All India Pal Mahasabha, the National Yuva Prajapati Samaj and the All India Kashyap-Nishad-Bind Ekta Mahasangh. The banners illustrated two important aspects of the SP's strategy: first, it relied entirely on ascriptive classifications. Although the conference was nominally for the backward classes, there was not a single banner speaking for a class based or other non-ethnic group.² Second, the SP, like the BSP, sought to build support not by attempting to weld individual castes together into a common cultural community, by stitching discrete communities into a coalition with the common interest of achieving political power.

1. Pichda Varg Mahasammelan (backward classes rally), Lucknow, 16 December, 1996.

2. See Marc Galanter: 'Who are the OBCs?' *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. XIII, No. 43, October 28, 1978), for the point that the term 'class' in the category backward classes was intended to be, and has come to be, accepted as, a euphemism for caste.

By the end of 1990s, the S.P., thus, targeted all Muslims, defined as a cohesive religious minority, and all backward castes, Hindus (Yadav, Kurmi, Lodh, Prajapati, Saini, etc.), and Muslims (Teli, Ansari, Qureishi, Banjara, Nai, etc.). Muslims were courted by purposefully highlighting the dangers posed to them by the BJP and describing the SP as the only party committed to protecting themselves and security.¹ Backward castes were courted by demanding affirmative action for them in representative institutions, and mobilising them against the threat to their political position posed by the proposal to introduce 33% reservations for women in parliament.² In particular, the SP made special effort to reach out to the lower sections of the backward castes. Mr. Yadav refuted the frequently made argument that his government had worked for the benefits of Yadavs more than other OBCs, and promised to address what he described, as the legitimate concerns of their more deprived sections, though he refrained from identifying them as a separate political bloc, as the BSP has begun to do.³ Finally, the SP also made an effort to recruit support from among the 'forward' castes. This initiative dates back to the 1993 election, when the SP-BSP alliance had come to the power by drawing a sharp line between the 'forwards' composed of the Hindu 'upper castes' and

1. Mulayam's deliberate melodramatic description of the riots following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in his various speeches in 1993-94, and also later reveals as much about the SPs attempt to keep the threat of the BJP alive as about the actual danger posed to Muslims by the BJP to retain its support among them through the relatively low cost strategy of promising protection.
2. For instance, SP leader Beni Prasad Verma pointed out: 'Attempts to divide us continue, now in the form of women's reservations if the proposal of this is implemented, then our position will slip further In our state, hardly 15% of women are literate. And from among BCs, only 1-2% So which women are going to go to parliament ! Not the women from this 54% We say first give reservation to BCs, and from that 33% to women in parliament', interview on *Star News Channel*, Big Right 27 July, 1997.
3. *The Times of India* (January 19, 1998); *Pioneer* (January 16, 1998); *Frontline*, (December 27, 1997 and January 9, 1998).

the 'backwards', composed of the BCs & SCs and the Muslims. The SP had been more conciliatory towards the upper castes than the BSP, and in the 1996 assembly election, it made a bid to attract upper caste support by allotting approximately 21% of its tickets to its candidates.¹ In 1998 and 1999, it continued this effort, increasing the percentage of tickets allotted to upper castes to 25% and openly appealing for their support.²

Significantly, the one category excluded from the SP's appeal was the SC. The issue raised by the party through out the 1990s during its mobilisation campaigns in fact aligned it with other caste categories against SCs. Literature distributed at the BC rally, far from courting SC support, demanded parity in development scheme for the BCs with those already existed for the SCs . During the 1996 and 1998 election campaigns, Mr. Yadav accused SCs of misusing the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act to humiliate members of others caste categories.³ Finally he called upon Muslims upper caste and backward castes to come together to defeat the BSP. Speaking at Saharanpur, from where Mr. Kanshi Ram stood for election, he declared: "They have come here after having done a survey that taught them to fight where there are no Yadavs. In Phulpur, Yadavs defeated them. Here, brother there are no Yadavs. But there are our Muslims brothers, our Rajput brothers, our Brahmin brothers. Make sure that such people lose their deposits."⁴ Significant, here is that Mr. Yadav did not seek Mr. Kanshi Ram's defeat by attempting to demonstrate his own commitment to SC interests, but by mobilising a coalition of other caste categories against SCs.

1. See Chandra and Parmar, 'Party Strategies'.

2. Adarsha Vaishya Samachar (February 5-10, 1999); *Pioneer* (August 4, 1999).

3. S.P. election rallies at Etah, 17 July 1996; Sultanpur, February 24, 1998

4. S.P. election rally, Saharanpur, February 14, 1998.

The core support-base for the SP comes from Muslims and Yadavs.¹ In order to obtain its winning margin in ethnically heterogeneous constituencies, it could have exercised the option either of seeking upper caste support, or SC support or both. Why did it not choose to seek the support of SCs, either by seeking an alliance with the BSP, or by courting SC support independently? An SP-BSP alliance was closed mainly because of the vociferous opposition of the BSP. The option of seeking SC support independently was no doubt, made more difficult by the polarisation between the sections of the BCs and SCs, alluded to earlier. However, it cannot be taken as a sufficient reason. In addition, the decision seems to have been based on the calculation that the SCs were firmly welded to the BSP, and could not be weaned away in one or two elections. As one former SP candidate assessing his party's prospects put it: 'If you want SC support, you need to form alliance with Kanshi Ram. Otherwise, you can forget it'.² The political unity of SCs in U.P., however, is superimposed on significant differences among individuals castes classified under the label. The calculation, therefore, is best understood as a short term reaction to immediate circumstances. There is no reason why it might not be revised in subsequent elections. The immediate difficulty of obtaining support from the SCs made it all more imperative for the SP to make an aggressive bid for the support of the BCs and upper castes to obtain its winning margin.

The SP registered the sharpest gains in the 1998 Lok Sabha election, increasing its vote by almost 8% compared to the

1. Chandra and Farmer : *Party-Strategies*.

2. Interview of former SP candidate shown in 'Election Analysis' on *Star News Channel*, October 15, 1999.

1996 Lok Sabha election. In 1999, with 26 seats, it emerged the second largest party in U.P. and with support spread throughout every region of the state, except Uttarakhand,¹ the party is perceived as capable of defeating the BJP in near future.

(B)
**COALITION CASE OF HINDUTVA AND REGIONAL
IDENTITY: MAHARASHTRA**

In the light of the overall evolution of political culture in India, the politico-ideological formations in Maharashtra presents an interesting paradox. While the state historically has given birth to a persistent, if limited, constituency for a variety of Hindu nationalist organisations, and discourses, its rich and diverse range of non-Brahminical and lower-caste assertions², as well as the centrist dominant Congress party in the state has provided absorbing setting for the state-politics. In the 1990s, in this context, the discursive formation of Hindutva was, received in the state as a part of an ideological, and political battle between the Congress hegemony, and other political forces, such as Shiv Sena. The unequivocal political character of the unique brand of Maharashtrian Hindutva – never able to parade as a religious matter, and thus conceal its central preoccupation with politics, and power. The BJP, and Shiv Sena were from the outset bogged down in the predicament of all oppositional forces in the state, and invariably had to function within the strategic possibilities of a political field whose rationalities, distribution of ideological stances, framing of 'legitimate problematics', and caste-arithmetic had been defined by the Brahmin-Maratha-

1. In Uttarakhand, it is the leading party. In every other region it is closed on the heads of the BJP.

2. Ram Joshi : "Politics in Maharashtra-An Overview", in Usha Thakkar and Mangesh Kulkarni (eds.): *Politics in Maharashtra* (Bombay, Himalaya, 1995), p.3.

antagonism, and the peculiarities of the Congress-machine in Maharashtra, anchored, above all, in the social organisation of power, and cultural symbols in Maharashtra. The 1990s unfolded with the 'saffron wave' modifying certain relations, and communalising the political arena, but in many ways, by the dawn of new century, stalled and displaced by the resilience of the structure of the patronage and the hegemonise 'marathaised' political culture prevailing in the state.¹

(I) RIDING THE SAFFRON-WAVE: 1986-1992

The Shiv-Sena's adoption of a new aggressive communal populism from 1984 onwards, and Mr. Sharad Pawar's return to Congress in 1986 presented as new set of strategic possibilities, and compulsions to the BJP. Shiv-Sena's victory at the Mumbai Municipal elections in 1985, and its subsequent expansion in Marathwada, and other parts of the state suddenly turned the party into the most dynamic non-Congress force in the state. This left BJP in a strategic dilemma caught between the image of a moderate kind of 'loyal opposition' to Congress it had build up since the mid-1970s, and the stringent communal campaign of the Shiv Sena, which successfully occupied the better part of the political, and discursive position previously associated with Jan Sangh. If the BJP was going to survive and grow into a significant force in the state politics, some sort of understanding with the Shiv Sena was imperative.²

It was, however, the return of Mr. Sharad Pawar to Congress in 1986 which created the most significant opening for

1. It is indicative of the gap between the 'cultural narcissism' of the middle class milieu in which the Sangh Parivar had developed its base for years, and the dominant political culture in the state.

2. See interview of Mr. Pramod Mahajan in *Organiser* (Delhi, December, 1992). P. Mahajan, was then Joint General Secretary of BJP, responsible for Maharashtra.

the ensuing 'saffron-wave'. The BJP had an elaborate organisation all over the state, and had for many years, systematically sought to articulate, and organise grievances of petty-traders, small-producers, unemployed youths, and other groups, which the accelerated economic growth in rural areas threw up outside the realm of more stable structure of patronage. However, most of the younger Congress (S) activists who rallied around Mr. Pawar's projection of himself, and his party as the incarnation of Maratha strength, and honour spontaneously went to the Shiv Sena. Within a few years, Mr. Bal Thackeray emerged as the primary political mass-leader of the opposition, outstripping the BJP leadership who could not match his inciting rhetoric, and his unrivalled capacity for attracting huge crowds.¹

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance was formed prior to the 1989 General Election, as a relatively loose agreement on seat-adjustments, in order not to divide the pro-Hindutva vote. The campaign was largely fought out by each on different programmes, whose common denominator merely was the rhetoric of Hindutva. The alliance was able to win 10 seats (4 to Shiv Sena, 6 to BJP) based on almost 25% of the vote. Though, a meagre result in terms of seats this marked a remarkable advance in the vote-share for both. Besides, the belligerent campaign of the alliance compounded a feeling that Hindutva-wave was in the making. However, the Congress-machine in Maharashtra once more proved its capacity for winning elections, and secured another massive mandate for the party.

Meanwhile, BJP Shiv Sena alliance began to prepare for the Assembly Elections in the following year. The alliance was based

1. For more detailed analysis of Shiv Sena's strategies and rural expansion in the 1980s. See Thomas Blom Hansen : "The Vernacularisation of Hindutva : Shiv Sena and BJP in Rural Maharashtra", *Contribution to Indian Sociology* (Vol. 30, no. 2, 1996, (b)), pp. 177-214.

on a straight forward calculation. The BJP needed Shiv Sena, which had an appeal in 'plebian' sections in urban as well as rural areas which the BJP's more middle-class and upper-caste image hitherto had prevented the party from gaining access to. BJP was, therefore, still vulnerable to Congress' effective anti-Brahmin critique of the party as 'the new *Peshwas*'. The alliances with the Sena was a way to win elections, a way to consolidate a popular constituency, but as importantly, a way to overcome the Brahminical stigma sticking to the BJP inspite of long-standing efforts to induce Marathas, and OBCs into the front ranks.¹ There was also confidence that the party due to its superior organisational capacity for consolidating support in the long run would benefit more from the alliance than the Sena. While, the Sena's leadership clearly expected that the alliance with the BJP would lend it some of the middle class respectability, which its political *dada'ism* threatened to do away with. Besides, it would benefit from the BJP's experience and skills in parliamentary affair, which at this point were largely absent within the party.

In March 1990, it was Mr. Thackeray's rabid but effective public posture² in the high profile election campaign that especially made the Shiv Sena emerge as the major opposition to the Congress, and in spite of elaborate and efficient

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1. Gopinath Mundhe, from the Vanjari-community (OBC) in Vidarbha, leader of the BJP's groups in the state assembly from 1990s, and deputy Chief Minister in the Shiv Sena/BJP cabinet, is one of the successful product of the party's systematic projection of lower caste leaders as grassroots leaders with an uncanny knack for knowing the people's pulse. See admiring portrait of Mundhe in *Observer*, 8 March 1990.
 2. Shiv Sena's aggressive 'defence of the Hindus' during riots and communal disturbances in Bhiwandi and Mumbai in 1984, and in Marathvada in 1988, had given it a popular reputation which the Sangh Parivar's more respectable style could not match. For a more systematic analysis of Thackeray's rhetoric, see Hansen, Thomas Blom : 'Recuperating Masculinity : Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim "Other"' in *Critique of Anthropology* (Vol. 16, no. 2, 1996) (a), pp. 137-72.

organisational expansion, the BJP still played the role as 'junior partner' in the alliance, trying to utilise the considerable response, which the *Shilanyas Puja* in 1989 had evoked in the rural districts of Vidrabha and Marathvada.

The aggressive campaign of the Hindutva-combine, however, did also modify the economy of the stances in the political field, which now was bifurcated with the Janata Dal, RPI, Left Parties and Shetkari Sanghathana siding with their old foe Mr. Pawar against the SS-BJP alliance. The Congress' and the JD's main card against this alliance was a reformulated version of the historical antagonism between Brahmins and Marathas. Especially, the Congress managed with considerable skill and innovation to project itself as the protector and spokesman of the bahun samaj by invoking Jyotiba Phule, as the mahatma of *Varkari-bhakti* tradition, and the Gandhian legacy – as opposed to the Sangh Parivar, still effectively branded the murderers of Gandhiji. Another strategy of Congress was to file legal suits against a number of Shiv Sena and BJP candidates, demanding de-recognition of their candidatures on the grounds, that they were violating the restrictions on employing religious themes in election campaigns.¹

The result of the 1990 Assembly Elections defeated the hopes of the alliance winning a majority, in spite of the impressive gains by it. The result also confirmed the uncontested leadership of Mr. Pawar in Maharashtra Congress Party. Congress lost its absolute majority and won only 141 seats out of 288 (with a 39.1% of the vote), while the BJP—Shiv Sena alliance

1. Although this strategy failed to have immediately impact on the election-campaign or results, it demonstrated to the BJP that its alliance with Shiv Sena could cost the party dearly, and could jeopardise the painstakingly constructed image of a party respecting democracy and civic values — an image which even party's opponents at this point accepted.

won 94 seats on 27% of the vote. Congress, hence, formed a cabinet in alliance with RPI (Athawala), one of the factions of the Dalit party, and succeeded on the basis of the imperative of a joint front against the Hindutva forces, to reach important compromises with the JD in the state.

In spite of their exclusion from administrative power, the ascendancy of the BJP and Shiv Sena as the third, and second largest parties in the Assembly signalled that the moderate left of -centre rhetoric and policy orientation which had prevailed in the state since 1950s, now has come to an end. The political landscape of the state was deeply divided, and the alliance had emerged as the only effective alternative to the established Congress-rule, that had made itself a vehicle of broad-based communal sentiments, of the assertions of ascending social groups hitherto excluded from political influence, as well as the vehicle for regional protest from the three relatively backward regions of the state, Vidarbha, Konkan and Marathwada, where the historical weakness of Congress had enabled the alliance to mobilise significant rural support.

Later the same year, BJP's commitment to the alliance was severely tested when the Shiv Sena activities and utterances embarrassed the BJP leadership on several occasions. The most evident example was the issue of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Mr. Thackeray had criticised the entire idea as 'casteist and divisive', thus jeopardising the Shiv Sena as the potential beneficiary of a larger political mobilisation of OBCs in the state, which the BJP state level leadership deemed necessary, immediately sensing the possibility of projecting itself more favourably to the OBC-constituencies, clearly enough to

attract votes. To the BJP, the difficult task was to display its commitments to the Mandal-formula, while simultaneously, to hold on the support from the upper castes, and groups of Marathas which the party required to consolidate its standing in the rural areas.¹

Conveniently, for the alliance, Mr. Advani's *Rath Yatra*, soon became a dominant theme which overshadowed the political agenda, even in Maharashtra where worship of Rama never was as popular as in Northern India. The BJP maintained that the *yatra*, was spontaneous expression of the politics full of strategies, calculations and secular ideology open to debate and questioning,² attempting to walk a public tightrope between democratic respectability and blatant communal majoritarianism. In context, the Shiv Sena pursued to the embarrassment of the BJP, a clear militant and anti-democratic line.³

In the campaign prior to the general election in 1991, the optimism of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance was unhampered. On this occasion, the BJP downplayed the Mandal issue. The parts seemed to fall back on the conviction that the anti-Mandal and

1. The chief organiser of the BJP in the Marathvada region, Sharad Kulkarni, put the disjuncture between the RSS-ideology of integration and the ground realities of caste-divisions and caste politics in the following way: 'We are not entering into caste-politics, we have to play due to some compulsions. Our elected representative from a particular community does not identify himself with his castepeople think he is of particular caste and that we should go for him, but we (internally) from the party-angle and the leadership always try to project him as the leader of the whole society Higher thoughts must prevail in society and smaller thoughts will go. You cannot eradicate it (caste, TBH) you will have to replace it' (Interview, *Organiser*, January 1993)

2. *Economic Times*, (8 Oct., 1990).

3. Thackeray reportedly called upon the *Kar Sevaks* to totally destroy the Babri Masjid (*Sunday Observer*, 4 November, 1990) and female activists from Shiv Sena's *Mahila Agadhi* attacked a Janata Dal rally. Throwing stones, chains and other things at the stage, the women prevented the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav — a sworn enemy of the Hindutva-forces — from speaking in Mumbai. (*Economic Times*, 3 October, 1990).

pro-Mandir vote is ours as it was said again and again, and that a clear stand on these issues in itself would secure atleast 40% of the vote. Sensing that the party had improved its image in Maharashtra after the *Rath Yatra*, the BJP went for a tougher bargaining with the Shiv Sena on seat distribution. Above all, the negotiations made it clear to the Sena that a still stronger BJP at the national level was not content with being junior partner in the state any more.

In the ensuing election-campaign, the Shiv Sena tried to outdo BJP, and released a video 'Flames of Patriotism', which probably is the single most communal and violence - inciting piece of election - material ever presented in Indian politics. Mr. Thackeray's hailing the murderer of Gandhi as a true hero and also his earlier allegations that Dr. Ambedkar had been financed by the (Muslim) Nizam of Hyderabad determined to splinter Hindu society through Muslim-Dalit alliance (a favourite demon of the Shiv Sena), proved, however, to be an unexpected asset for the Congress campaign in the state.

In an unprecedented relaxation of the otherwise tightly centralised selection of the candidates the Congress high command had given Mr. Pawar an almost free hand in Maharashtra. After consolidating his support within the party, forcing warring factions together, and silencing dissent, and public criticism, Mr. Pawar launched a rather effective and powerful election campaign. On the one hand, Congress promised economic stability and improved regional development, while it, on the other hand, tried to stigmatise the BJP and Shiv Sena as irresponsible trouble- makes and upper-caste urbanities, good at rabble-rousing and creating communal violence and enmity, but unable to deliver development, governance or order. -

The result of the election was surprising even to the Congressmen. The Congress secured 48% of the vote (45% in 1989), and won as many as 37 out of 48 seats. The BJP lost votes, and secured only 20.6% (23.7% in 1989) and lost half of its seats, and was only able to secure seats in Pune, Mumbai North, Thane. The Shiv Sena faced slightly better, as it managed to hold on to two seats in Vidarbha, (held by two defected Congressmen), and Mr. Moreshwar Save's seat in Aurangabad. But even the Shiv Sena lost votes, and secured 9% of the popular vote (1989 :10.2%).¹ Though the BJP clearly performed better in this election than in assembly election, the dismal result of 1991 was blamed on the uncomfortable alliance partner Shiv Sena, accused of not utilising its share of votes properly, and held Mr. Thackeray's unpredictable utterances responsible for the alliance's vulnerability to a well-oiled Congress campaign.

Congress hurled another series of blows at the Shiv-Sena-BJP alliance by scheduling local election for Zilla Parishads and Municipal Corporations in February 1992, and later by engineering the defection of long standing Shiv Sena leader Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, and 12 MLAs from the Shiv Sena to Congress in December 1991. The idea behind coordinating Zilla Parishad, and Municipal elections was to force the Sena to concentrate on Mumbai, and hence make the rural districts an easy victory for Congress. Another device expected to reduce the influence of the Sena and BJP was the reservation of 30% of all seats in local elected bodies for women. Given the male-dominance within both parties, and their apprehension regarding gender-equality, this new provision was expected to be detrimental to the alliance.

1. Chiriyankandath, James : "Tricolour and Saffron: Congress and the Neo-Hindu challenge," in Subrata Mitra and J Chiriyankandath, (1992) ; pp. 269-273.

The defection of Mr. Bhujbal provided a pretext to the BJP for breaking up the alliance which has become still more troublesome after the 1991 General elections. The student organisation of the Shiv Sena, '*Bhartiya Vidyarti Sena*' (BVS) and ABVP had repeatedly been engaged in violent clashes on several Mumbai campuses in August 1991, and the increasing factionalism within the Shiv Sena made the alliance still more troublesome to the BJP. After the decimation of the Sena, the BJP emerged as the largest opposition in the State Assembly, determined to fill the vacuum created by the disintegration of non-Congress opposition, attempting to carve out its own independent identity.¹

In the elections the Shiv Sena lost its strategically crucial majority in the Mumbai Municipal Corporation. The party's communal populism could not compensate for the maladministration of the city, the decline in infrastructure and civic-amenities, and the systematic corruption which the Sena corporators have carried to an unprecedented level, associating openly with the builders and underworld dons. Congress' promise to make a Dalit the next Mayor of Mumbai also contributed to secure a large number of Dalit votes for the Congress-RPI alliance in the city.

The alliance between the Shiv Sena and BJP broke down at the local level, as it became evident that both had emerged as competitors for the same constituencies, which were no longer expanding, and hence, no longer offered sufficient room for the

1. The party staged a '*Upa-yatra*' a local yatra moving through the Congress heartland in the sugar districts of western Maharashtra, in a bid to rid itself of the Brahmin stigma still hanging to the party, and in order to challenge the Congress power in these districts, displaying all the sentimental and religious ingredients associated with the BJP. However, lack of developed infrastructure of the RSS in these areas, barring Pune, made the yatra a failure in attracting public attention or arousing nationalistic feeling in the predominantly rural districts of Marathwada and Vidarbha in early January 1992.

accommodation of the interests of both. Local election are fought on the basis of the day-to-day performance of local politicians as brokers of economic and symbolic resources, rather than more elusive emotional waves or catchy slogans. In that situation, the common rhetoric between the two parties ceased to be an effective means of cohesion. The BJP had in course of its alignment with the Shiv Sena successfully extended its influence to 'lower castes' sections in the urban as well as rural areas, while the Shiv Sena had gained a foothold in the urban middle classes outside the Mumbai area. Leaders from both the parties maintained, nevertheless, that they would form another alliance in the next Assembly or General Elections, and that the breakdown of the alliance only was to be seen as tactical and temporary move.

The prominence of the alliance as the prime movers behind the 'saffron wave' in Maharashtra caused deep dissension in the Sangh Parivar in the state. Many of the RSS-cadres of a purist mould disliked the association with the Shiv Sena, and felt that the politicisation and 'marathaisation' of Hindutva, made the entire organisation in the state, vulnerable to the 'creeping Congress culture'. Among the so-called pragmatic party leaders and activists, however, (committed to fine-tune the political strategy of the BJP as a political party rather than as a Sangh Parivar subsidiary), the alliance was regarded as convenient and compelling electoral arrangement, given the continued weight of the Congress in the state. Besides, alliance enabled the BJP to profile itself as a relatively sane and moderate party, promoting 'respectable Hindutva', while at the same time, keeping the electoral benefits of the radical rhetoric and 'reputation' for action of the Shiv Sena. Nowhere was this more evident than in the peculiar economy of public stances displayed by the two parties during the tense months of December, 1992 and January, 1993. After Ayodhya episode, the Shiv Sena battered on its home turf in Mumbai by the Congress and searching for a

come back, began circulating stories of how the demolition was undertaken by 500 specially trained Shiv Sainiks. The BJP was more than willing to disown the responsibility for that event found these rumours quite useful in their attempt to retain a respectable image in Maharashtra. Later, in December when Shiv Sena initiated the infamous Hindu mass-prayers (*Mahaartis*), and in other ways whipped up communal sentiments in Mumbai,¹ the BJP-leaders publicly called for moderation and the peace, while large number of Sangh Parivar activists participated in the prayers, and played an active role in the large riots that rocked the city in the second week of January 1993.

(II) A SLIM VICTORY

The alliance was mended in the last minute in January 1995, in the run up to the State Assembly elections, and it was able to secure 138 seats in it, 74 for the Shiv Sena and 64 for the BJP. After negotiations with parts of the unprecedented number of MLAs elected as Independents, the alliance could present a cabinet led by the Shiv Sena's leader in the Assembly, Mr. Manohar Joshi, as the Chief minister and the BJP's leader in the Assembly, Mr. Munde, as this Deputy. Though a victory in seats, the performance of the alliance was not very impressive in terms of increasing its share of votes, or making advances into new areas. More than half of the seats won were in urban constituencies, and in areas where it already had strong standing.² Congress was almost entirely ousted from all major

1. See Sharma, Kalpana: "Chronicle of Riot Foretold" in Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (eds): *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India* (Delhi: OUP). Also see Masselos, Jin: "The Bombay Riots of 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration", *South Asia*, (Vol. XVIII, Special Issue, 1994), pp. 79-95.

2. The alliance won its clearest victory in the Mumbai region where it secured more than 49% of the total vote and won 30 out of 34 seats, while the UP-based SP won 2 seats in constituencies dominated by lower-caste groups and Muslims. In Pune, two MLAs were elected for the Shiv Sena (Shashikant Sutar in western Pune, and Deepak Paygude in the 'plebian' side of the Old city (Bhawani Peth). BJP had elected two MLAs in Pune (Girish Bapat) and a Maratha, Dilip Kamble), another MLA in Pune district, and as many as three MLAs in Nagpur.

urban centres. The rural vote for the BJP and Shiv Sena came from Konkan where Shiv-Sena already established its dominance in 1990; from Vidarbha where BJP had established itself in 1990 also strongly, and from Marathvada where especially the Shiv Sena had regained a strong foothold, particularly in Aurangabad district, Jalna and Beed, whereas the BJP made somewhat slower progress in the region.¹ Scandals in Marathvada and Vidarbha, incidents of police brutality in Nagpur, and the fatal management of the earthquake in Latur, affecting the southern districts in 1993 had seriously damaged Congress general image, while the Sangh Parivar's ability to organise the relief work had left a lasting impression here. Besides, the Shiv Sena's violent campaign against the renaming of Marathwada University in January 1994 had once more galvanised its popularity among Marathas, and the OBCs in the region.² The BJP choose the strategy of distant support to the renaming issue as part of their larger, and not entirely unsuccessful, strategy of attracting various Dalit groups to the party. This reinforced the benevolent paternalism of the Sangh Parivar, obviously spurred by the fear of a repetition of the alliances between the OBCs, Dalits and

1. In the rural districts as a whole, the alliance percentage of the popular vote decreased or remained at the same level as in 1990. In Vidarbha, the percentage even slipped from almost 35% to only 25.9% in 1995, though the number of seats increased from 22 in 1990 to 33 in 1995. The victory was here mainly connected to devastating factionalism within the Congress party. In Marathvada the percentage remained stable, and Haribhau Bagade was re-elected in Aurangabad east, and the BJP won another seat in Sillod taluka north of Aurangabad. Shiv Sena regained its foothold in Paithan and in Aurangabad city. (For an analysis of the election, see Guru, Gopal: "Assembly elections in Maharashtra: Realignment of Forces", *Economic and Political Weekly* (vol. XXX 8 April, 1995), pp. 733-736.

2. In January 1994, Sharad Pawar who are everybody else was impressed by the show of the lower-caste assertion in U.P. and Bihar in the Legislative Assembly elections of November 1993, decided to implement the renaming of the Marathwada University. This decision suddenly energised the Shiv Sena in the region and bands, strikes and rallies were announced. The government sent paramilitary troops to the area in mid-January 1994 and as the Shiv Sena realised the determination of the government on this issue, it quickly backed down and cancelled the actions.

Muslims in U.P., contributed to give the BJP the largest member of reserved seats in the State Assembly.¹

The remaining Congress constituency was in the election, sharply divided between several warring factions and an unprecedented number of dissidents Congressmen were running as independents. This allowed the somewhat 'normalised' and to the occasion sanitised Shiv Sena and BJP to emerge as credible alternatives, and win several seats with rather modest number of votes, which it also allowed the alliance to point forcefully at Congress' weakness and incoherence. The series of allegations of corruption and mismanagement in 1994 had depleted the authority of Mr. Pawar, and made it feasible for the BJP and Shiv Sena to run a hard-hitting anti-Congress campaign.² Meanwhile, the Shiv Sena tried to control many inner divisions coming to the fore in the election-campaign. Provincial leaders like Mr. Save went out with public criticism of the enissary of the Mumbai leadership supervising the campaign in Marathwada, and several of Thackeray's old allies and founder members of Shiv Sena, like

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1. Out of 18 seats reserved for the SCs in the Legislative Assembly in Mumbai, the BJP won 7(3 Chamars, 1 Mahar, 2 Matangs and 1 from the Sweeper's community) and the Shiv Sena 4 SC seats (which all went to Chamars). The remaining (mainly Mahar) went to the RPI, Left Parties and Congress (See Guru 1995: 734). What is truly remarkable is that a large share of the Dalit votes, for decades was a stable support for Congress, seemed to have changed sides, at least, temporarily. Although none of the reserved constituencies have anything near a majority of Dalit voters, and many high caste voters do vote for the SC candidate of their preferred party, the reserved seats do, nevertheless, have considerable value as signifiers of the egalitarian commitments which most parties try to espouse. There is clearly a shift in political loyalties among Dalits, a shift which obviously is connected to the general, fragmentation of Congress and its failure to provide employment and education opportunities for these communities. However, there is no doubt that the protected attempts to 'Hinduise' SC communities 'back into the Hindu fold' has paid-off just as the long standing assertiveness and relative success of Mahars have engendered allegation of their 'monopolisation' of the Dalit cause and thus contributed to push Chamars and Matangs in the direction of the BJP and Shiv Sena.
 2. For a overview of some of the issues in the election see *Sunday* (22-28 January, 1995). On the allegations against Pawar for large-scale corruption from high-ranking IAS officers, see reports in *Frontline* (7 October, 1994). For Thackeray's allegations that the Enron-deal benefited Pawar personally, see interview, *Sunday* (26 March-1 April, 1995).

Mr. Madhav Despande, ran as independent against the Shiv Sena in order to expose rampant corruption, nepotism and *gharanashahi* (dynastic rule) in the party.¹

Although the election-campaign at the level of slogans and speeches mainly was directed against Congress and corruption, the massive victory of especially Shiv Sena in the most communally tense areas, testified to the sedimentation of anti-Muslim sentiments in what one may call the 'political unconscious' of the large number of people. The total dominance of the Shiv Sena in Mumbai, Aurangabad and other places marked by communal tensions and bloody trajectories in 1992 and 1993 was hardly a coincidence, that Shiv Sena in its campaign was the only party which on several occasions employed a radical communal rhetoric, and tried to make the liberation of the Hindu shrines in Matura and Kashi a part of its propaganda. The Shiv Sena leadership was well aware that beneath its anti-Congress bravado, its most solid source of support both from the middle class and the more popular sectors, remained its image of being 'ultimate defenders of the Hindus'.

Only two weeks after the voting, a survey of votes preference was made by political scientists from Pune University from a sample of 1055 respondents in 15 constituencies, representing and encompassing the regional variation in composition, and size of population, urban-rural differences etc. in the entire state.² Out of this survey, emerged a picture of the relative strength of Congress and the Hindutva-parties, and a social profile of their respective constituencies, which in many

1. For reports on various instances of dissent in Shiv Sena, see *India Today*, (28 February, 1995).

2. Palshikar, Suhas : "Capturing the Moments of Realignment", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Vol. XXXI, 13-20 January, 1996), pp. 174-8.

ways confirmed trends and correlation identified through a survey conducted almost three years earlier.¹

Firstly, the Congress was clearly the most preferred party with 38% of the respondents supporting it while the alliance only attracted 25% (Shiv Sena 10.5% and BJP 15%). This indicates that the higher proportions of MLAs elected on the Shiv Sena tickets also has to do with its bargaining power *vis-à-vis* the BJP in the allotment of tickets to joint candidates, rather than the actual popularity of the party per se. Secondly, the profile of the Hindutva voters emerging from this state-wide survey is a middle-aged, urban, higher caste voter with some education and modest or good salaries – in urban areas often non-Maharashtrian (from Gujarat or North India), while the profile of the 'typical' Sena voter is that of a slightly younger, less educated Marathas or the OBC with the modest income, rather evenly drawn from urban and rural area. In contrast the Congress supporters were drawn from all areas, classes and castes, with a slight-over-representation of Marathas, rural dwellers and lower castes as compared to other parties.

The caste composition of the 1995 State Assembly did not change dramatically with the relative decline of Congress, and advances of the Hindutva parties. The Shiv Sena had clearly made itself the main alternative for dissenting or young rural Marathas opting for a career outside the Congress, and dominant political position of this caste-cluster was reflected in the high proportion (more than 55% of all members). The caste composition of the 64 BJP MLA's reflected the party's systematic strategy of transforming its upper caste image. Only 10 of them were Brahmins, 24 belonged to the Maratha-Kunbi caste

1. Hansen, Thomas Blom : "The Saffron Wave : Democratic Revolution and Hindu Nationalism in India", (Vol. 1-3); *International Studies* (Rocksline University, 1996), pp. 639-887. Also see Hansen, Thomas Blom: "Vernacularisation of Hindutva : BJP and Shiv Sena in Rural Maharashtra", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (Vol. 30 no. 2, 1996) (b), pp. 117-214.

clusters, and out of the remaining 30 most came from the SC communities (7), nomadic communities (8) and the OBCs (6) and various non-Maharashtrian communities (9).

However, the urban slant of the alliance was reflected in the composition of the Cabinet, which had more Brahmins on vital posts (C.M. plus two ministers), and less Marathas (only 4 against 10 under Mr. Pawar), while only half of the ministers were elected in rural areas. Whereas the BJP during its campaign seemed eager to project itself as a rural party, and project Mr. Munde, as an idealist social reformer "whose passion and goal it is to see that every village in Maharashtra has electricity, water and road", the Shiv Sena made it a point during campaign to promise a solution to many urgent infrastructural and housing-problems of major cities in the state.

The alliance was able to win as many as 33 parliamentary seats in the 11th General Election in 1996, with a joint percentage-votes of 38.5%, while the Congress with a joint percentage-votes of 34.9% could only win 15 seats. This strong performance of the alliance stemmed from two factors. Firstly, there was a further consolidation of the strongholds of both parties in certain regions of the state. In Mumbai, the alliance secured all six seats and polled 58.3% of votes; in Vidarbha 9 out of 11 seats (40.4% of the vote; in Marathvada 6 out of 8 seats (39.4% of the vote) and in the coastal Konkan strip the Shiv Sena swept the polls and the alliance won 4 out of 5 seats (46.2% of the vote). Secondly, the Congress was ridden by deep running dissent and factionalism in many regions, which produced a large number of independent candidates. In northern Maharashtra, where neither the Shiv Sena, nor BJP ever had a strong presence, Congressmen defected to the BJP, and made it

possible for the alliance to secure 5 out of 6 seats (45.6% of the vote).¹

As in previous elections, the agreement between the two parties gave more seats to the BJP (18) than the Shiv Sena (15) although the latter gained far more than the BJP, and tripled its representation in Lok Sabha as compared to 1991. It was clear, however, that Shiv-Sena sensing its own indispensability *vis-à-vis* the BJP in the state, went into tougher bargaining with the BJP prior to the election and the party was able to take over several constituencies controlled by the BJP for years (such as the Thane constituency). The results of the 1996 General election in the state thus, testified to the general weakness of Congress and indicated that BJP, at the price of concessions to the Shiv Sena, had consolidated its standing considerably, and had broken out of its urban higher caste core-constituencies. Both have, in fact, attracted substantial share of votes from the SCs. While the BJP systematically mobilised Dalits, especially non-Mahars, the Shiv Sena's share of Dalit votes has to do with the general plebeian profile of the party, rather than its espousal of a distinct Dalit identity.

During the local elections in February-March 1997, tensions mounted within the alliance, and as in 1992, it failed to reach an agreement on seat-distribution. It was simply impossible to accommodate the many contestants, and both parties experienced an unprecedented level of dissent, and factionalism, not least in Mumbai, where the stakes in terms of potential patronage and financial gains from a post as corporator are very high. In spite of the many political scandals and the trenchant public criticism of the Shiv Sena, the party was able to

1. Internal division in the Congress also produced independent candidates in many other constituencies in the state and enabled the Shiv Sena and BJP alliance to win comfortable victories on the basis of modest gains in votes, while the percentage of votes drawn by independent candidates in many constituencies went beyond 30%.

secure as many as 103 seats (out of 221) in the Brihadmumbai Municipal Corporation, while the modest strength of the BJP in the metropolitan area was revealed as it only secured 26 seats. Congress candidates won 49 seats (as against 109 in 1992), partly because of the massive swing of Muslim votes towards the SP, which was able to win 21 seats, mainly from the low income and the Muslim areas of Greater Mumbai. In the other major cities of the state, the Shiv Sena and BJP reinforced their hold on the urban electorate, except in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad, where the Congress retained its hold.

(III) DECLINE AND DEFEAT

In downtown Mumbai, tucked between the MLA hostel and headquarters of the Maharashtra Police, is a small vending stall. A board listing the various types of food stands outside the stall and the last item listed *zunba bhakar* – costs Re. 1. This stall represent one of the many schemes promised by the Shiv Sena/BJP government, when it came to power in state in 1995, providing lands and grants so that poorer labourers in both urban and rural areas could receive a meal for Re. 1. However, very soon, these stalls were selling snack items priced considerably higher than Re. 1, and one would be hand pressed to find labourers among the crowds milling around the front ordering food. The government explained this deviation from the original purpose of the project by arguing that these stalls could not become self-sustaining if other more expensive items were not sold. The opposition and journalist, sceptical of this rationale, allege that these stalls were distributed by the Sena leaders to reward their loyal workers, and although all of these stalls offer the Re. 1 meal, the fact that very rarely do poor

people frequent these stalls indicates the failure of this scheme to actually deliver subsidised meals to the poor.¹

The failure of the Re. 1 meal plan, among host of other unfulfilled promises by the Shiv Sena/BJP government, open the story behind the rout of this alliance in the 1998 Lok Sabha election. The alliance went from having 33 parliamentary seats to retaining only 10, while the Congress increased its number of seats from 15 to 37, of which 4 were won by its coalition partner, the RPI. Although, the non-performance of the alliance was an important issue, other factors, including the Congress-RPI-SP alliance, the temporary abeyance of factionalism within the Congress and the RPI, vigorous campaigning by Congress leaders such as Pawar/Bhujbal, and changes in the patterns of caste voting were equally vital in ensuring the Congress win.

In 1996 Lok Sabha election, it was speculated that a major reason why the Congress had not managed to defeat the BJP/Sena alliance was the presence of candidates who were either Congress rebels running as independent and/or candidates from the RPI, SP, JD or various communists parties, who took away votes that would have enabled a Congress win.² But in 1998 election, Mr. Pawar's organisational skills prevented such destructive internal rivalry. Further, the RPI and SP leaders realised that their only hope of gaining a seat in parliament was to ally with the Congress, rather than run against it, and

1. Tushar Gandhi (SP candidate), interview in *Bombay Times*, May 5, 1998.

2. While independents polled almost 10% of the votes in 1996, in 1998 they only polled 2%. Further, the number of candidates fell by almost 2/3. (to 377 from 1,065 of which 805 were independent while the Congress, BJP and Shiv Sena fielded 48, 20 and 25 candidates respectively). In contrast, in 1998 of 377 total candidates, 171 were independent, 41 from the Congress, 25 from the BJP and 22 from the Shiv Sena, (percentage of independents dropped from 76% in 1996 to 45% in 1998) and consequently, given the higher voter, official party candidates received more votes.

consequently, the RPI factions of Athavale, Gawai, Ambedkar and Kawade, and the Congress formed an electoral partnership which delivered 4 seats to the RPI. This alliance did not prove so profitable for the SP as none of its candidates won.¹ But, the presence of this party in the alliance attracted Muslims and SC swing votes, giving Congress the winning margin in several constituencies. Therefore, the Congress alliance eliminated triangular contests and consolidated its votes in opposition to the BJP and Shiv Sena. In 1998, the context had mainly changed because crucial swing voters were slowly becoming disillusioned with the Shiv Sena/BJP, and they had decided that the Congress was lesser evil. Such voters included low and middle income Maharashtrians in Mumbai, OBCs in certain rural constituencies, and Dalits and Muslims both in Mumbai and elsewhere.² Moreover, the failure to fulfil election promises, actions such as slum demolitions and the alliance government's delayed response to crop failures in Vidarbha as well as corruption created sharp anti-incumbency factor.³

Coming to the year 1999, Maharashtra went to the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls simultaneously. Most observers anticipated that Mr. Pawar's decision to break away from the Congress would benefit the alliance. Few, however, had predicted just how devastating its impact would be. After the coming of election results, a senior BJP leader commented that we would give stickers to our MPs and MLAs to put them on their shirts on which would be written : 'Courtesy — Sharad Pawar'. There is

1. It was argued that the JD, which had declined to join the Congress alliance, siphoned off votes that would have made the SP candidates victorious.

2. Atrocities against Dalits, including a shooting in the Ghatkopar area of Mumbai which left 11 Dalit youth dead and other isolated incidents of violence, persuaded the politically active Dalit Buddhists and other SCs to return in some numbers to the Congress fold. P.G. Jogdand : "RPI-Congress Alliance : Softer Option", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. 33, May 9, 1998); pp. 1071-72.

3. Rajendra Vora : "Shift in Power from Rural to Urban Sector", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. 31, January 13-20, 1996).

more truth in this comment than satire. Mr. Pawar proved to be a demolisher for the Congress while S.O.S. for BJP/Shiv Sena. Though Congress may not accept this, but its a political reality that in Maharashtra Mr. Pawar may not catapult the Congress to the zenith of victory, but he has strength to defeat it stupendously.

It is being said that if the Congress would not have divided, they it would have displaced the BJP/Sena alliance. The NCP and the Congress together won 16 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats. United they had taken 33 seats in 1998, and their combined vote-share rose significantly from 1998 level (i.e. 29% - 7% higher than 1998). Congress with its allies got 12; NCP and the allies 9 and BJP & Shiv Sena got 15 and 12 seats respectively. All in all, illusions of all three —Sonia (Congress), Pawar (NCP) and the BJP was broken. Only the Shiv Sena did withstand up to its claims. Whereas, it was believed that the party will be wiped out in the 1999 elections. Mr. Pawar who has built his strategy on the confidence of attracting 35% of Shiv Sena's vote proved himself wrong.

In reference to the Vidhan Sabha election, it is altogether a different story. Congress emerged as the largest party with 75 seats, whereas NCP got 57, Shiv Sena 62 and BJP 50 with Others 16. There are different set of reasons for the success of Congress here. In 1995, when the Congress was united in the assembly election even then it got 80 seats. There was massive revolt in the Congress in that election, and on 40 seats dissident Congressmen were elected as independent. Afterwards, on the support of half them the alliance ruled Maharashtra for the full term. The main cause of the success of the Congress in this election was the huge discontent of the people against the Sena/BJP alliance. In this, contribution of Sonia factor is

insignificant. In fact, Congress was defeated in many of the constituencies in which Mrs. Sonia Gandhi did rallies. But, it is also true that leaving her, there was not a single leader in Maharashtra who took the responsibility of electoral campaign for the party. Congress was in disarray and its leaders pessimistic. Even then, the party was able to secure 75 seats which in itself is a surprise. According to the analysts the clear meaning of this event is that in some areas of Maharashtra the roots of the Congress are so much deeply embedded that whosoever may lead the party, voters do not shift. Even Mr. Pawar was not able to shift them, and he has to explore new support base for himself.

(C)
**COALITION FRONT OF RADICAL POLARISATION:
WEST BENGAL**

West Bengal is something of an exception in India's contemporary landscape. Whereas many states have experienced political instability over the past decade, West Bengal has been relatively well governed, and that too since 1977. That stability has been remarkable, because it has not been the result of low levels of political mobilisation; probably the state is India's most politically mobilised. West Bengal's restoration and maintenance of the political order naturally direct our attention to the issue of how growing crises of coalition governability can be reversed, and coalition-rule can be sustained.

This study traces the roots of West Bengal's recent stability to the fact that a well organised reformist party has remained in power. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), has been repeatedly elected to office in West Bengal since 1977. The party

is communist in name only, and is essentially, social democratic in its ideology, social programmes and policies. The party's disciplined, effective organisation has minimised the debilitating elite factionalism and the related elite-led mobilisation and counter mobilisation so common in some other states. The CPM has also consolidated a coalition of the middle and lower strata by implementing some modest redistributive programmes. That systematic incorporation of the poor has reduced the attractiveness of populism, and its emphasis on deinstitutionalisation. And finally, the CPM has adopted a unthreatening approach toward property-owning groups, whose role in production and economic growth remain essential for the long term welfare of the state.

The CPM's rule in West Bengal has not been without its share of problems. The party may be well organised, but its relation with other parties, especially other leftist parties, have occasionally led to political discord,¹ and attempts to maintain an alliance of middle and lower groups have generated serious problems for its ongoing programme of redistribution. Moreover, like other ruling communist parties elsewhere, the CPM is beginning to give rise to a 'new class' of privileged members, who are resented by those excluded from the perks of power.

The CPM type of rule in West Bengal does not offer a model for the rest of India. Even if it did, there are historical and

1. What has primarily sustained the coalition is the numerical majority of CPM which with almost two-thirds assembly seats, is able to form government in West Bengal, without the support of other constituent. The withdrawal of support by other coalition parties, including CPI, Forward Bloc, and RSP, shall, therefore, make no difference to the dominant party within the coalition. This is probably one of the formidable reasons cementing the bond between the CPM and other coalition partners who know that their existence as political forces largely depends on being associated with the leading party of the coalition.

cultural reasons¹ because of which, it would not be likely to be replicated. Thus, a discussion of the West Bengal experience serves not a prescriptive purpose but an important analytical function. In spite of its many problems, West Bengal under the CPM probably is the India's one of better governed state. The coalition that supports the CPM is relatively stable; the gap between the government's commitments and its capacities is modest; and political violence along caste, class, or communal lines has been minimal. An understanding of how the CPM has achieved such effective coalition tends to reinforce this study's earlier emphasis on the political causes of the coalition governability crisis in India.

Politics in West Bengal is normally not linked with an electoral process.² In those cases, where elections have prompted comment from journalists and scholars, attention has been directed almost exclusively to the ways in which the electoral politics reflects increasing radicalisation of the populace, either by the Left or by other political forces. Overcrowded conditions, high level of politicisation and intense feeling of relative

1. There has been no good study of the origins of communism in Bengal. Some helpful insights can be derived from the following: Gautam Chattopadhyay: *Communism and Bengali's Freedom Movement*. (N. Delhi Peoples publishing house, 1970); Muzaffar Ahmad: *The CPI and Its Formation Abroad* (Calcutta, NBA, 1961); David N. Druha: *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism* (N.Y., Bookman Associates, 1959); Gene Overstress and Marshall Windmillar: *Communism in India* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959); M. N. Roy: *Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964); Bhabni Sengupta: *Communism in Indian Politics* (N.Y., Columbia University 1992) V.B. Karnik: *M. N. Roy: A Political Biography* (Bombay, New Jagriti Samay Pub., 1978); Marcus Franda: *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).
2. Interest in Bengali politics has tended to focus on such dramatic events as the terrorism of the nationalist movement, the wave of communal killings on the eve of the partition in 1947, the insurrection launched by the CPI the sporadic flare-ups of violence in Calcutta in 50s and 60s, Naxalities in late 60s the Bangladeshi agitation of early 70s and more recently Gorkhaland agitation in the 80s etc.

deprivation.¹ The tragic dilemmas resulting from its nightmarish demographic situation² definitely exhibits in the viability of Bengal politics; and have produced wide variety of radical political movements in Bengal. Moreover, the electoral involvement of the state's radical political parties has not been simply a "camouflage", or a part time activity designed to conceal more sinister conspiratorial games, but has been, instead, the central concern of most of the leaders and members of these parties. Consequently, political life in Bengal has been for more complex than stereotypes would allow, and electoral arena has also become more salient in the state than is usually the case elsewhere.

(I) CONFRONTING GRASSROOTS REALITIES OF THE LEFT FRONT (LF) COALITION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE OPPOSITIONAL STATE POLITICS IN THE 'NINETIES'

For a good part of the past 24 years, politics in West Bengal has been almost predictable: the Leftists in office, fixed as a door post and the opposition in perpetual disarray. However, in the 1990s, the state, powerhouse of Left politics, entered into a new phase of politics in which the element of predictability, if not diminished, have been reduced. This trend is marked by two traits: confronting grassroots realities of UF and transformation of opposition politics in the state.

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1. "They [The Bengalis] are constantly aware.. of past glories and present potentialities. They do not forget either that Calcutta was for long the country's capital or that Bengalis took the lead in the freedom movement. Once they swayed the destinies of India; now they cannot even determine their own", a *Statesman* editorial written in June 1950, quoted in John Broomfield: *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. XVIII.
 2. The Indian census of 1991 lists 88, 880, 095 people in W. Bengal decennial growth rate of 27.2%. More than a million people are added to the states population each year . *Census 1991* (Govt. of India Publication 1993).

Till 1996, the UF had every reason to be euphorically exulted. The Front was voted back for a record fifth time, with the final tally in the assembly still projecting very one-sided with the LF winning 203 of the 294 seats and the CPM still in absolute majority by itself, along with constituting major chunk of the United Front coalition at the Centre in the Lok Sabha elections held that year. However, in the Lok Sabha elections, 1998 the Left Front received a jolt, when the newly formed Trinamul Congress displaced the Congress-I as its main rival, and picked up 7 seats. Wide sections of the LF including the leadership, had expected an increase in its seat share as a result of division of non-Left votes, primarily between Congress-I and Trinamul Congress (TC), and also possible alienation of Muslim votes from the TC following the seat sharing with the BJP, being quite complacent about the results.

But, the election results rudely belied such expectations. Though the number of seats won by the LF did remain unchanged, what happened was nothing, but, a major setback. In a large number of assembly segments (i.e., in 90 or so) the loosely constituted TC-BJP combine led. The BJP also opened its account in the state by winning in Dum Dum, an industrial suburb in Calcutta. Many observers read it as the beginning of the end of the LF's uninterrupted dominance. However, sections within the LF tended to argue that the defeat in Calcutta, and the neighbouring urban, and industrial areas is not something new, and in some of the constituencies, for example, Midnapur and Basirhat, the margin of victory has increased. Also in vast areas of the state in countryside, the LF has been able to keep intact its support base.

But, a close scrutiny of the election result, particularly, of the percentage-share of votes secured by the LF candidates in

the total valid votes in the different constituencies, reveals a disturbing picture. In the state as a whole in comparison to the 1996 electoral performance, the LF suffered about 92% decline in the votes secured by it, securing increase in its vote-share in only 8 out of 42 seats in the state. In each of the three Calcutta Lok Sabha constituencies-Calcutta North, Calcutta Northeast and Calcutta Northwest- its share declined sharply.

No less striking was the LF's performance in the preponderantly refugee, and lower middle class inhabited Jadavpur assembly segment falling under the Jadavpur LS constituency. The Left has never lost in this segment, even in the 1972 rigged election. But this time the LF candidate Mrs. Malini Bhattacharya trailed behind the victorious TC candidate Mrs. Krishna Bose in each of the eight counting rounds. Moreover, while in the 1996 election CPM candidate, though defeated in the parliamentary constituency, had a lead of 24, 377 votes in this assembly segment, in 1998 he lagged by 15, 566 votes.

The three CPI candidates contesting from outside the Calcutta Metropolitan region, although were able to retain their seats, and also increase their margin over that of 1996, but of them only Mrs. Gita Mukherjee's vote share increased. In Midnapur, the vote share obtained by Mr. Indrajit Gupta declined by 3.61% and in Basirhat, primarily a rural constituency, the share of Mr. Ajay Chakraborty went down by 2.81%. In Barasat, another traditional Left constituency, also a rural, where Muslim voters constitute approximately 30% of the total voters, the share of the Forward Bloc (FB) candidate, Mrs. Chitra Ghose declined by 3.49%. It was claimed that LF's support has remained unaffected in north Bengal, where it won all seats except in Maldah (a Congress stronghold). But, for except in Coochbehar, the percentage share of votes obtained by

all the victorious LF candidates in north Bengal declined from a low 0.54 in Jalpaiguri and 0.55 in Balurghat to as high as 4.07 in Alipur Duar and 7.07 in Raiganj.

Briefly, following were some of features shown by the election results of 1998. The voters in the urban and industrial areas, who had in earlier election of 1989, 1991 and 1996 had been shifting away from the LF had shifted away further. Substantial sections of voters in many semi-urban and rural areas too had shifted away. All the shifts took place in favour of TC and BJP, comprising bulk of the traditional Congress voters as well as very large sections of the Left voters, including lower middle class, industrial workers and urban poor, refugee population, and urban youth. It also deserves mention that considerable sections of the Bengali Muslims retained their support for Ms. Mamta Banerjee.

The electoral battle in 1999 Lok Sabha elections was widely perceived as a major trial of strength for both the sides, which would provide enough hints about the outcome of the state Assembly elections, which are due in 2001. A quick glance at the results suggests, that the Left Front has not lost, as much as it would have lost, had the 1998 trends continued. To be sure, it won 29 seats, four less than it did in 1998. It is for the first time since 1984, that the LF has conceded as many as 13 seats to its opponents. Far from being able to snatch from the BJP, the only seat it won in 1998, the LF conceded another seat. Yet what looked like a surge of the TC-BJP combine seems to have slowed down. TC won 8 seats, against 7 in 1998. In terms of vote share, the LF's losses were negligible this time, though at 47% it stood much lower than its vote shares in 1989 and 1991 elections. The TC - BJP combine increased its vote share only by a little over 2% points.

Perhaps, the key aspect of the verdict was the ability of the Congress-I to survive, despite having been reduced to the third place in the 1998 elections. In India's first-past-the-post-electoral system, such results normally cause a political party to take a nosedive in subsequent elections. But, the party lost only two percentage-points in its vote share. In fact, it was even able to consolidate its votes, and win two seats in addition to Maldah, which it retained. Clearly, although the overall vote share of the LF in the latest election was far below peak, the TC-BJP combine could not consolidate any anti-Left votes in its favour.

The Congress-I did not only retain its share of about a quarter of the votes in north Bengal, but a substantial share of the votes in Greater Calcutta, much to the chagrin of the TC-BJP alliance. Although Ms. Mamata Banerjee and her allies maintained their dominance of the urban cluster in Greater Calcutta, they lost a seat here to the LF. The best news for the TC-BJP alliance is that it has begun to make inroads into the reveal hinterland of south Bengal, hitherto an impregnable fortress of the LF. TC won in Barasat, Nabadwip and Contai¹ and the BJP won in Krishnanagar and the alliance adding 3% points of votes.

The flow of votes as revealed by the CSDS survey shows that the TC-BJP alliance retained the votes that it has polled in 1998. It also gained 24% of the Congress-I votes of the last time. The LF retained its own votes to slightly smaller extant compared to the BJP but made up for the loss by snatching some Congress-I votes. On balance Congress-I lost more to the TC

1. The defeat of Sudhir Giri, who had won four successive parliamentary elections in Contai, came a stunner. Nitish Sengupta of the TC defeated him by 12, 133 votes. CPM State Secretariat member Binan Bose acknowledged that the Left Front was late in reaching out to the people and "convincing them about the danger of communal forces." C. M., Jyoti Basu admitted that the fact that the LF's performance was a matter of "concern". He said that the party would see where it had failed and try and make rectifications. *Frontline*, November 5, 1999.

than to the LF. Had the exodus to the TC been on a larger scale, the LF could have been in real trouble, and the contest would have taken a clearer bipolar character.

The electoral support of the LF has a pro-lower class profile, but not quite as sharply as in Kerala. Although, it does best among the lowest section of society, it does very well among the highest too. The Congress-I in West Bengal does better among the well-off than the poor, which is contrary to its usual profile elsewhere in the country. The TC-BJP does best among the middle categories, thanks to the respective profiles of the two parties cancelling each other out to a large extent. The TC has a slight lower class profile (it polled 35% among this section), whereas the BJP performs best among the better-off sections of the population (it received 26% of the votes from the 'middle').

Although, caste-based polarisation is not as sharp in West Bengal as it is elsewhere in the country¹, caste still makes a difference. Compared to 1998, the Congress-I lost support among the upper castes, and Muslims, and yet, suffered virtually no loss of support among the OBCs and the SCs. The LF lost noticeably only among the Vaishyas, whose support for it fell by 10% points. In both these cases, the beneficiary was the TC-BJP alliance. The TC was successful in mobilising support across caste and community lines. Compared to 1998, its vote share among Kayasthas (an upper caste), Namasudras (a SC), and Muslims rose by 12, 9 and 15 percentage points, respectively.

Although, the LF is still the party of choice for rural voters, of whom 50% voted for it, it has been replaced by the TC-BJP combine as the most popular party in the urban areas. In 1998, the LF enjoyed a 15% points lead in vote share over the TC-BJP

1. See Jyotirmoyee Sarma :- *Caste Dynamics Among the Bengali Hindus* (Calcutta, Firma KLM Pvt.Ltd., 1980); Hitesranjan Sanyal : *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta, Papyrus, 1981).

in the case of urban votes. In 1999, it suffered a 12% point deficit. The electoral results in West Bengal, at the turn of the new century, indicate that although the ruling LF still remains a stronghold, with highest support among the middle aged voters, (the formative moment in whose political consciousness was when the LF made its triumphant entry into state power 20 years ago); women voters and lower rural castes and classes; it may be loosing ground in some pockets to the TC-BJP combine.

Election results and governmental performance are not the only indicators of the performance of any government in a democratic set-up, but they are, nonetheless, central to any viable strategy. Leaving aside, the agrarian and agricultural economy and that too, mainly in the first decade of being in power, the LF, and particularly the CPM has failed to workout, and project any coherent, and meaningful alternative policies with any radical perspective for social transformation, and increasingly began to lose its ideological and political perspective and also its directional orientation.¹ By the mid-1990s, the crucial question became what next?² Some of the crucial defaults lay in the growing divergence from mass participatory activities, and movement, the increasing dependence on the government and administration, the rapid erosion of lines between ruling parties and their front organisations, and the virtual squeezing out of all non-government and non-party public organisations

1. 'Hence, the LF experiment is failure from the point of view of a transition to socialism or the development of a specific type of capitalism drawing upon liberalisation'. Op. cit., Rosa Mullik: *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalisation* (OUP, New Delhi, 1994), p.239.

2 For example, the LF failed to formulate any viable programme for a more from limited land reforms to a more comprehensive agrarian and rural transformation. See, Nripen Bandyopadhyay : "The story of Agrarian Struggles and Land Reforms in Bengal and West Bengal" in Manoranjan Mohanty and Partha Nath Mukherjee (eds) : *People's Rights: Social Movements and the State in Third World* (Sage, New Delhi, 1998). Moreover, no action has been taken to implement the recommendations of *New Horizons for West Bengal's Panchayats: A Report for the Govt. of W. Bengal, 1993* and *The Recommendations of the State Finance Commission of W. Bengal, 1994* till date, aimed at making the administration more transparent, democratic, effective and accountable.

from the social space.¹ The politicised panchayat system that allowed popular participation and accountability, because of failure to be linked up with any long-term perspective, there has been blurring of distinction between politicisation of the panchayats as a popular participatory movement, and as an instrument of partisan party control. Related to this, has been increasing dominance of the rural middle-class teachers, government employees—separated from production, upper sections of the peasantry and rural rich, resulting in marginalisation of small, and marginal peasants, agricultural workers, and rural poor.

The situation in the urban areas has, meanwhile, become dismal. The most disturbing factor that decisively swung the verdict against the Front is the nexus between “ruling party leaders, big and small, and those out to make fast buck by bending the power of the government, and the party in their own direction and the growing realisation that those in power are too busy to reap the fruits of their own dominance to care for what happens to others”.² What irks, and disheartens ordinary people in the steady decline of urban services, including electricity and transport.

The situation is equally dismal in several other most important aspects of health, and education. Despite good doctors, and other health workers around, the decay in basic services is appalling. Moreover, the growing practice of according priority to those with recommendations by the local party activists for treatment in the government hospital alienated a large number of committed voters, leave alone, non-committed

1. Abhijit Gupta : “Bridging the Rural Divide”, *The Telegraph* (April 10., 1998), p. 7.

2. Partha Chatterjee: *The Present History of West Bengal*, p. 136

ones, who found, in this, a deliberate effort to marginalise those opposed to the Front.¹ Moreover, the Left Front policy of completely eliminating English up to 5th standard contributed to the erosion of its support among the urban middle class.² Even as regards recruitment of teachers, from primary to the university level, merit is a discount, and what appears to be decisive is the approval of the CPM high command in the state.³

The gradual decay of civic amenities, like maintenance of roads, regular cleaning of street garbage, also consolidated the opposition to the Front in urban areas. Neither, the Calcutta Corporation nor other municipal bodies in the outskirts made any significant impact on the mind of urban voters as significant and effective civic institutions. A shocking example of utter carelessness was the tragic death of three-year-old, as a result of his fall in uncovered manhole on a Calcutta road, and the widely reported statement of the concerned minister belonging to the CPM blaming the mother.⁴

In other persuasive reasons for the diminishing popularity of the LF must certainly include its failure to accomplish the promised industrial resurgence in the state. Notwithstanding open invitation to the MNCs following the adoption of a highly liberal industrial polity, the inability of the Front to reverse the industrial decline, or ever to mitigate the stagnation after more than two decades being in power has caused serious discontentment with it among a large section of urban

1. Even a sympathetic Bengali daily like *Aajkal* warned the Front of the probable serious consequences of politicising health service in the state. See editorial of *Aajkal*, (February 16, 1999) and (April 23, 1999).

2. *Peoples' Democracy*, Weekly organ of the CPI(M), April 18, 1998.

3. Bidyut Chakrabarty : "1998 Elections in West Bengal: Dwindling of the Left Front?", *Economic and Political Weekly* (December 12, 1998), pp. 3224-3220.

4. See the *Telegraph*, February 12, 1998 ; *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Feb. 12, 1998 ; and *The Statesman*, Feb. 12 1998.

population.¹ The nodal agency for industrial regeneration, West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) headed by CPM MP, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, has apparently failed to usher in any visible impact on the industrial front. The fanfare with which the WBIDC was hailed, was short-lived, since till March 1997, 18 of the 26 projects were shelved after having spent almost Rs. 12 million. During 1996-97, the loss of corporation was as much as Rs. 120 million though its chairman did not stop undertaking expansive foreign visits, presumably to attract the MNCs to the state.² Furthermore the industrial scene is equally devastated due to reasons connected with mindless crude economism that far from industrial rejuvenation, has led to the closure of factories, and consequently, retrenchment of a large number of workers corroded the support base of the left coalition substantially. In such a milieu, the comfortable BJP victory in an industrial suburb like Dum Dum does not seem to be surprising.

While, the electoral politics can be considered in the context of the performance of the LF, it is equally important to recognise that electoral contest in West Bengal was marked by a significant realignment in regard to the ruling, and opposition parties present within the state. So, it becomes necessary to examine their campaign times and functional characteristics, which was able to realign the social forces in influencing the electoral outcome in the 1990s.

The CPM electoral strategy primarily hinged on the capitalisation on the Congress split, concentrating on the

1. See for details, Ranjit Dasgupta; "West Bengal: Industrial Development Policy-A Critical View", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (July 29, 1995).

2. Somnath Chatterjee's frequent foreign visits and signing of memorandum of understanding (MOU) earned him a title of mockery, "MOU Chatterjee" by the local press. For details of the role of WBIDC, see Essenjit, "West Bengal: Grassroot realities confront Left Front", *EPW* (March 21-27, 1998), p. 633.

Congress-I and not the TC-BJP combine, as its main rival. Given that political contests in West Bengal have been traditionally two-way affair between the Left parties and the Congress-I, this strategy may be understandable. The advent of the TC, together with an hitherto marginal BJP presence, obviously suggested that the opposition vote would be polarised, which for CPM, would largely negate any anti-incumbency backlash from the electorate. Also the CPM ran its campaign, on a predominantly national agenda with Mr. Jyoti Basu's eye for the office of P.M., and the party's primary goal of the LF becoming the largest force in any United Front coalition,¹ should that situation arise. In these respects, the CPM's main rival in the state was, consistent with the front's national strategy, the Congress-I. But this strategy failed, as it greatly underestimated Trinmool and BJP.

Throughout the Left's campaign, the Congress-I was criticised for its faulty economic policy, but in the light of the CPM's increasingly acquiescent line of economic reforms, it appeared somewhat inconsistent. Moreover, the Left could not convince people by its oft-repeated attack against Delhi, as it did supported the UF government in 1996 from the outside (CPI did participated) with no change. The LF repeatedly deflected the debate away from contentious local issues. Indeed, throughout the 1998 campaign, almost everywhere the Left relegated local issues to the periphery, framing the opposition's attacks, and local grievances within the wider all-India context.² In Uluberia, the CPM's Mr. Hanan Mollah restated the party's position,

1. Sending a feeble to the Bengal's sense of pride and thereby 'recover' at least part of this glory. Also the UF forming the government by itself, having no truck with Congress-I failed to create any confidence among the electorate for whom the stability at the Centre was a major consideration. CSDS poll survey, *Frontline*, 16 December 1998.
2. Partha Chatterjee has referred to this strategy of the Left in his analysis of the 1996 election campaign in West Bengal; see Partha Chatterjee (with Pradip Kumar and Ranabir Samaddar): "Discipline and Development" in Partha Chatterjee (ed.): *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism* (OUP, N. Delhi, 1997); pp. 137-82

declaring that, it was the panchayats' elections, which constituted the forum for raising local issues, the Lok Sabha elections were about..... "determining the country's future."¹

The electorate did not hear anything substantial, except worn out slogans like: 'Delhi Chalo', 'our next responsibility is to run the Centre, and expression of personnel vendetta against or the rallying cry against BJP (branded 'barbaric', 'beastly' and 'uncivilised'), What probably affected the urban sensibilities most seriously was the irresponsible utterances against the TC chief as being "a 420", "a cheat and liar" from an octogenarian patriarch like Mr. Jyoti Basu. The campaign probably took the most ugly turn following the alliance between TC and BJP when Mr. Mamata was exhibited in huge banners in south Calcutta as having a sort of illicit affairs with Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani², who are eloping with her. Further, in absence of a clearly spelt out political programmes to counter the so-called anti secular bogey, and instead explaining the BJP as a phenomenon, and the probable consequences of a BJP government in Delhi, the strategy of more verbal castigation was certain to fail in urban constituencies where, the most articulate and politically aware section of Bengalis live.³

In contrast to the LF, the opposition- TC-BJP combine constructed their respective campaigns predominantly around local issues, which featured prominently in a majority of electorates throughout West Bengal, and in process, the Trinmul

1. Kshaunish Sarkar & Subhendu Maiti : "CPI-M hopes for sixth win", *The Statesman*, February 21, 1998.

2. Even some of the hardcore CPI(M) activists, leave alone sympathisers, condemned the personal vilification of Mamata Banerjee who never indulged in personally attacking her poll opponents. The prominent dailies, *The Telegraph* (English) and *Ananada Bazar Patrika* (Bengali) created a constituency for Mamata by constantly harping on the "insult" meted out to a lady which had seriously harmed the *bhadralok* 'sensibility'.

3. Bidyut Chakravarty, *Ibid.*, see, notes no. 18.

Congress, under the leadership of Ms. Banerjee, helped providing the BJP a space, in which to further its expansionist goals in the state, while for its part, the BJP give Trinmul—which is essentially a regional entity—a national conduit. This success of the alliance has relegated the Congress-I to the periphery of state electoral politics¹, and was also instrumental in determining the eventual regional permutations.

Trinmul Congress' strategy" was based on a platform fiercely anti-Left with elements of strident Bengali nationalism and anti-corruption. To TC, the electoral tie-up with the BJP, presented it an ally, with whom to forge a concentrated anti-Left campaign in the state. Further, in the event of the BJP coming to power, it offered a potential source of central support for her 'Bengal First' programme. The BJP's considerable resources, and organisational strength was regarded vital for TC's severely hampered in terms of both the finances, and personnel, with which, to manage a successful campaign.² Ofcourse, the high profile national identity of the BJP was also important to TC. Ms. Banerjee's hostility towards the parent Congress had hitherto only served to affirm the TC's regional character and hence, its restricted appeal among particular sections of the electorate.³ Given that the split in the Congress ranks would be potentially damaging to all opposition parties in West Bengal, it was imperative of TC that it broadens its appeal beyond the traditional Congress-I voters, particularly, if it was to penetrate

1. The results can be seen as confirmation of the Congress-I rank and files declining faith in the leadership of the party in the state. Michael Gillan : "Transformation of Opposition Politics in West Bengal" *EPW*, (Sept, 15-22, 1998).

2. James Mayers : "Transformation of Opposition Politics in West Bengal: Congress-I Trinmul and 1998 Lok Sabha Election" *EPW*, (August 15-22, 1998), pp. 2253-2260.

3. This made some sort of electoral co-operation an undeniable compulsion, particularly for an untested party such as TC, which has recently established itself organisationally grounded in the political rhetoric of uncompromising opposition to the long rule of the Left.

the rural stronghold of the Left. Principally, the BJP's own agenda, founded on a rationalised, albeit overt, Hindu nationalism projected through appeals of national unity, regional security, political stability, and a protracted continuation of the liberalisation process in the form of swadeshi economics, generally represented a macrocosm of Ms. Banerjee's own brand of Bengali chauvinism.

On the other hand, the BJP's strategy in West Bengal reflects the party's conviction to break its political isolation, and form important regional alliances throughout India, the basis of which has been to form regional ties with state opposition political formations, whose primary concern is the defeat of particular ruling parties at the state-level. This implies a 'localised' electoral strategy and a concurrent use of the BJP's national leaders, electoral themes and political prominence within a specific state-context. In West Bengal while the party and associated Sangh Parivar organisations have attempted to propagate the ideological programmes of Hindu nationalism in a distinctive social and cultural context of Bengali politics, particularly *via* a strident campaign against illegal migration from Bangladesh, the BJP secured a degree of legitimacy for itself in the state, as a viable political entity by means of a programme of seat adjustments (in effect an undeclared electoral alliance) with the regionally based TC; logic of which was to divide the anti-Left vote, and open up a position for itself in the political space in West Bengal. Also to the BJP, the TC represented a 'legitimate' outlet for the 'moderate' face ported by Mr. Vajpayee.

In the light of this electoral strategy, the primary theme of the BJP campaign in West Bengal was the 'common ground' of opposition to the LF, by attempting to draw attention to the

failures of the state administration, allegations of institutionalised corruption, suggestions of CPM cadres involved in political intimidation, and lack of adequate social and physical infrastructure, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. In predominantly rural constituencies, the BJP's attack upon the LF for its economic record, and apparent tacit acceptance of the rapidity of liberalisation measures, revolved around the social impact of rising prices, and stagnating performance in rural development through the domination of the CPM in the panchayat administration. In industrial centres, the BJP attempted to draw attention to the closure of industries, the unresolved problems of 'sick' industrial units, high level of unemployment, and failure of the LF in reviving Bengal as an important site of industrial growth. Importantly, the BJP's campaign were based around issues, which have significant local resonances, yet it remained intrinsically 'national' in orientation, simultaneously, capable of being associated with the broad conceptions of Hindutva ideology, blending with its national political prominence and the question of the future stability of any non-BJP led government at the Centre.

Lastly, Congress-I strategy, (especially, after the exit of Mr. Narasimha Rao's government in 1995) towards West Bengal was mainly dictated by the logic of post-poll scenarios in the event of hung Parliament, when the party would be obliged to rely on the outside support of regional allies, and parties within the National Front-Left Front alliance, in order to stake any valid claim to forming a minority government. However, the Congress's increasing dependence upon such expedient alliances at the Centre has only further compromised the party at the state-level, as was proved in West Bengal. Here the central leadership of the party fostered a somewhat accommodating stance towards the ruling LF, and partly, the rift which developed between

Ms. Banerjee and the state leadership of the Congress-I was the direct consequence of such electoral strategy.¹

Besides, the changed party political context of West Bengal also helped the TC-BJP combine. Prior to the arrival of BJP as a party of any prominence, there has been the polarisation between the Congress and the CPM-led LF. However, with the relative national decline of the Congress, and the consequent rise to prominence of the BJP, there has been a gradual shift towards interaction, and direct co-operation between the Left and the Congress at the Centre in order to prevent the BJP from coming to power. As a consequence of these national developments, there was a significant degree of confusion among the ranks of both party workers in West Bengal, as to the nature and ramifications of any form of co-operation, allowing the BJP some latitude in representing itself as a consistent party of opposition in its relation to the CPM at the national and state-level. For regionally-based splinter parties such as Trinamul Congress, this contradiction between the compulsions of politics at the Centre, and that of a specific local political context, complied with organisational and electoral foothold established by the BJP in West Bengal in the 1990s, proved to be a more powerful political imperative than somewhat shallow pronouncements of support for the politics of secularism. Also the TC-BJP alliance, perhaps, worked more efficiently at the lower levels of the party organisations, and as the campaign neared in 1999, its culmination saw the workers of both party openly campaigning for other formation in an undeclared political alliance, despite public protestations on the part of the TC leadership that there was merely a pragmatic arrangement of "seat adjustments."

1. The split in the state Congress should nevertheless be viewed as symptomatic of a wider malice within the party's organisational structure and an increasing opposition to the central leadership's control over the state branches of the party. This should send a clear message to the party hierarchy in New Delhi that any rejuvenation of the structure needs to have its genesis at the state level and below. James Mayers, *Ibid.*

CHAPTER-4

COALITION POLITICS: THE CENTRE

The purpose of the study in this chapter is to analyse the changing nature of the Indian State at its summit. By the 1990s, it has become increasingly difficult for the Indian State to accommodate conflicting interests, and to promote socio-economic development. The political stability seems more endangered than was feared through these trying, and tumultuous times. In this context, several questions must now be addressed: How is central authority formed in such a context? Once it has formed, what strategies do leaders characteristically adopt to cope with the surmounting problems of coalition, a resultant of fractionalised verdict? How efficacious are the leaders and the political parties in dealing with the pressing problems of the *realpolitik* of coalition?

Instead of attacking these complex issues head on, we have chosen an indirect research strategy. What follows is an analysis of how the leaders, and their political parties sought to deal, with their own definitions of the priority problems of coalition during their terms in government, outside in support, and in opposition rooted in the logic of power. A governmental change/overthrow (an event), the way in which cabinet seats are assigned (a process), or the conditions under which minor parties form coalition with major parties in the Centre (a relationship)- these foci are clearly selective.

Eclectic in technique, the study of coalitions of the Centre includes descriptive case studies, and careful analysis of small number of cases with a belief, that there is a salient cue for decision in a coalition situation, where the cue is some kind of information about the players. This implies then, that the players

may (1) perceive the outcomes of initial resource differences (minimum resource theory); (2) reject these outcomes in favour of some more significant information (minimum power or anti-competitive theories); or (3) not perceive these outcomes or any alternative outcomes (random choice)¹. Utilising this systematic logical distinction, this analysis seeks for the type of situational factors that highlight these perceptions. This invariably means keeping the focus narrowly to the subject-matter boundary stressing on important, often unique events so that few general statements about the coalition behaviour could be developed and tested here.

The major components of the analysis are taken to be the (1) mixed motive actors with (2) an initial distribution of resources and (3) specified rules of game engaged in (4) communication and bargaining with a view towards applying (5) resources to determine an outcome and distribute returns, and how this has led to a number of specific activities of political consequences : (1) the reduced importance of initial resources, (2) choice of past partners for a stable alliance, (3) independence from external influences as new rules and resources developed through experience in the situation, and (4) activities associated with keeping the trust². Hence, those concerned with increasing the importance of initial resources, changing the status-quo, or introducing new issues, previously suppressed, would be directed to changing the repetitive nature of the game. They should try to increase turnover, or decrease the frequency of interaction, or limit the occasion when decisions are made. The overwhelming importance of personal and ascriptive factors rather than secular and rational factors, have contributed to the

1. Carol A. Mehrson : "Expectation and Informal Rules in Coalition Formation", *Comparative Political Studies* (27(1), April, 1994), pp 40-79.

2. Ibid.

absence of ideological boundaries between most of the parties, that prevent any polarisation to take place at the mass level of the polity; conversely due to the absence of ideological commitment of the masses, it follows that in democratic polity, even organised parties do not take categorical ideological stands.¹

Given these systemic conditions in the background, the era of coalition in the 1990s moulded the line of action of various political parties. This viewpoint supplies a new way of looking at coalition politics at the Centre. It is not limited to the notion of strategy or payoff, or a view of coalitions that seems to glorify the seedier side of political life. It is broadened by the political perspective to include any goals, any outcomes, any means of combining resources, leading to policy satisfaction, ideological principles, and belief about leadership.

(A)
START OF "NOWHERE POLITICS" AT THE
CENTRE : 1989-1991

(I) NATIONAL FRONT'S 340 TURBULENT DAYS

(a) The 1989 Elections - The Entry :

Mr. V.P. Singh had a taste of success when he parted ways with the Congress-I in 1987, and endeared himself to the opposition. He left the Congress alleging corruption in the form of kickbacks in the Swedish Bofors gun deal, and "foreign accounts" in Swiss banks. While accusing some ministers, and top-bracket civil servants of "benefiting at the cost of the people", Mr. Singh refused to share even moral responsibility in spite of the fact that he held the portfolios of Finance, and Defence, respectively, when the deal was struck. This seemed to present

1. Javed Alam, "Making Sense of the Election", *Seminar* (385, September, 1991), pp. 22-23.

no conflict to his "value-based politics". Projected by the opposition as the future prime minister, Mr. Singh showed deft tactfulness by bringing the BJP, and the Left together on a common platform in the NPE (Ninth Parliamentary Election) campaign. This was not an easy task judging by the nature of the two parties. Mr. Singh, who described himself as the "natural ally" of the Left, could have had difficulty in allying himself with the BJP. But the common aim of defeating the Congress-I helped him work out seat-adjustments among the NF (the National Front alliance led by Mr. Singh), the BJP and the Left "in over half of the 529 contested seats, and, more significantly in a majority of the constituencies in the important Hindi-speaking region that elects over 40% of the Parliament."¹

It was the same aim the defeat of the Congress-I that prevented Mr. Chandrashekhar from confronting Mr. Singh head on at that time. To him, Mr. Singh was basically an "opportunistic intruder" who joined opposition only after being expelled from the Congress. Mr. Chandrashekhar, with an enviable track record as an opposition leader, could have created problems for the anti-Congress camp, but his main priority then was to cause a humiliating defeat for the Congress-I. In characteristic style, he participated in the campaign, and contested as a candidate in the NPE, but at the same time, he made it clear, that he would never accept Mr. Singh as the *supremo* of the opposition.

The political chessboard immediately after the NPE showed: (1) the Congress-I had the largest number of seats, but was far from a majority even with its allies; (2) the NF, for all

1. Walter K. Anderson : "Elections (1989) in India. The Dawn of Coalition Politics?", *Asian Survey*, (June 1990), p. 531. The Janata Dal, Telugu Desham, Dravida Munnetra Kadagham, and Asom Gan Parishad (AGP) were the major parties forming the National Front alliance.

practical purpose, was reduced to a single party, the JD; the TD and the DMK were almost erased from their base, and the AGP did not secure any seats, because elections were not held in that state, (3) the Left, and the BJP, were in a position to play the role of "king-maker", but would only do so, if they shared the title. It was this chessboard, that provided ample scope to manipulate the arithmetic of the parliamentary system—the majority point, a product of the obligation, that a legitimate government be based on the support of the majority of the representatives directly elected to the parliament. It was also a mix, that contributed to the rise and fall of the two minority governments.

The first minority government at the Centre by the National Front, better known as the "crutch government", managed to bring the two perennial foes of Indian politics—the BJP, and the Left—to support it "from outside", neither of the two could afford to share government power as it would have been disastrous for their images. The issue of the two old foes supporting the NF was explained by the logic : the Congress-I had to be kept at bay. But, by no means this was exclusive factor in the formation of the crutch government. Another was, the opportunity for the BJP and the Left to "utilise" the minority government. For the BJP, it was time to play a waiting game, its leadership beginning to believe that, with the sharing of power, directly or indirectly, in six states, and of course at the national level, the party's chances had never been better. The BJP's firm conviction was, that it could form a government at the Centre after the next parliamentary election, if it could take advantage of the dissension within the NF, the limited political influence of the Left, the confused state of affairs in the Congress-I, and most important of all, the rising militant Hinduism. Support from the Left, however, was based on a short-term strategy. Its leaders

realised that Left support was vital to make the NF stronger than its numerical strength in Parliament suggested. They had no dream of the Left making it to Delhi on its own, but the circumstances put it in a better bargaining position, and they found it prudent to reap as many benefits as possible by supporting the government. For his part, Mr. V. P. Singh began to play with various complexities, and contradictions of the opposition camp, the mutual antipathy of the "crutches", the interests involved in their support for the NF, common hatred for the Congress-I, and his own image as "the man of the moment." Like a skilled juggler, he finally found a solution in the NF government that needless to say, benefited him the most.

(b) Operation Of The Government:

At the initial stage, it ran smoothly through the newly devised mechanism, critical support, which was the middle point between unconditional support, and total opposition to the government by the crutches. Both the BJP, and the Left criticised the government on a "friendly basis". They raised a wide range of issues, including escalating prices of essential commodities to secessionist movements in Punjab and Kashmir. Mr. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the CPM general secretary, clarified the nature of "critical support": "We shall continue to support the government, and continue to criticise this government. This is the best government under the circumstances, but whatever in our opinion is wrong, we shall say so forthrightly."¹ The statement is remarkably similar to that of BJP secretary Mr. K. L. Sharma: "In spite of everything we wish the government to continue. But at the same time we want the lapses to be

1. *The Hindu*, June 3, 1990.

covered... the BJP was 'opposing' the Government on certain issues as a friendly party."¹

For our purposes, it is more important to note that the mechanism of critical support served Mr. Singh more than it ever did the crutches. Mr. Singh responded to critical support by saying that he appreciated criticisms and thus, fundamentally differed from Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who was well known for his intolerance of even mild criticism. It is not difficult to explain why the crutches resorted to the support-pressure-support tactic. First, it helped to magnify their image, the electorate would perceive them as concerned enough about the public interest to criticise a friendly government. Second, and from an altogether different perspective, the tactic would prevent the NF-led government from assuming support of the crutches as a foregone conclusion and thus, from becoming self-reliant.

But it is more interesting to see how Mr. Singh began using the critical support. Realising that the crutches would not readily venture to the brink of causing the government to fall, he began playing one crutch off against the other. The best example of this was his handling of the Kashmir issue. Mr. Singh had appointed Mr. Mufti Mohammad Syeed, a Kashmiri, as home minister, the first Muslim to occupy the post in Independent India, much to the satisfaction of the "secular" Left. The BJP was totally opposed to the appointment, so Mr. Singh sought to pacify it by immediately appointing Mr. Jagmohan Malhotra, a BJP supported candidate, as governor of Jammu and Kashmir. When the Left became severely critical of Mr. Malhotra, Mr. Singh quickly imposed Mr. George Fernandes, the railway minister, and a socialist on Mr. Malhotra, vesting him with the additional charge of Kashmir affairs. Ultimately Mr. V.P. Singh replaced the governor to satisfy the Left, but to avoid antagonising the BJP,

1. *Statesman*, June 6, 1990.

he promptly compensated Mr. Malhotra by nominating him as a member of the Rajya Sabha. Mr. Singh's skill was also evident in the way he handled the sensitive issue of the long-overdue election for the Punjab state legislature. With a sudden spurt in terrorist activity, and killings of innocent citizens, Mr. Singh seemed to have realised the blunder in not holding the election, when he stated: "One thing I will regret all my life, for which I will never pardon myself, and I publicly acknowledge my mistake, of not holding elections."¹ A few days later, with the direct help of the Congress-I (which Mr. Singh once criticised for "perpetuating the Punjab crisis", and not holding elections), the government extended President's rule, and dismissed the demand for elections on the ground that both the BJP, and the Left were against it, thus passing the responsibility to the crutches. Mr. Singh's stance on the Bofors issue is yet another instance of his method of conflict-solving. During the campaign before the NPE, the opposition led by Mr. Singh severely criticised Mr. Rajiv Gandhi for not disclosing the names of the agents who appropriated the "speed money." But as prime minister, Mr. V.P. Singh was no different from his predecessor. "The zeal with which Mr. Singh seemed to take up the issue when campaigning against Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was not reflected in his follow up action as Prime Minister... it is interesting, that reports from Geneva should suggest that the National Front's initial requests for information from the Swiss authorities were as ambiguously worded as those of its predecessors."²

Paradoxically, while successfully applying this style, Mr. Singh was unwittingly sowing the seeds of destruction of the NF government. First, he committed a political blunder when he sidelined a leader like Mr. Chandrashekhar, and let him brew in

1. *Statesman*, September 18, 1990.

2. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray : "Man Who Never Was: Enigma of Mr. V.P. Singh and Bofors", *Statesman*, November 11, 1990

humiliation. While Mr. Singh complacently thought he had resolved the “contradictions” within the Janata Dal, especially the opposition of Mr. Chandrashekhar, the latter became more and more determined to oust Mr. V.P. Singh from power. Second, Mr. Singh underestimated the determination of the BJP when he avoided a solution to the controversial Babri Mosque-Ram Janambhoomi issue. The BJP decided not to press for a solution during Mr. Singh’s initial “teething troubles”, but as the prime minister, overconfident of his managerial ability, did not seek a solution to the problem, it gradually became a crisis and hastened his fall.

(c) The Descent:

August 1990 appears to be the month in which, the death knell sounded for the crutch government because of the confrontation, which ultimately proved fatal for Mr. V.P. Singh, between him, and Mr. Devi Lal, the deputy prime minister who had played a leading role in making Mr. Singh the prime minister. Angry over the Meham controversy¹ and increasingly frustrated with playing second fiddle to Mr. V.P. Singh, Mr. Devi Lal publicly called Mr. Singh “spineless”, and precipitated his own resignation, which started a chain of events that forced the pace towards Mr. Singh’s ouster. Immediately after he resigned, Mr. Lal organised farmers’ rally to show his political strength. To counter the actions of Mr. Devi Lal, who was a popular leader among the Ahirs, Jats, Gujars, and Rajputs, Mr. Singh made a decision, that would “live forever infamy.”² On August 7, two days before the rally, Mr. V.P. Singh announced that the government

1. In February 1990, O.P. Chautala, Chief Minister of Haryana and elder son of Lal, was accused by almost all political parties of mass-scale rigging and violence, resulting in death of one independent candidate, in the by-election in which Chautala himself was a candidate. Under pressure, Singh asked Chautala to resign and instituted a judicial enquiry.

2. *India Today*, September 15, 1990.

would implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, which had been gathering dust for ten years. If the recommendations, which stipulated reservation of 27% of jobs for the OBCs were implemented, and Mr. Singh's "willingness" to introduce a 5% to 10% quota for the poor materialised, the total jobs under quota would have jumped to an astronomical 59.5%, as India then reserved 22.5% of jobs for the SCs and STs. In his bid to garner support from the traditionally battered castes by increasing their quota, Mr. V.P. Singh banished the criterion of merit, and divided the Indians more than even before. An anti-reservation movement threatened to turn into a civil war, and self-immolation occurred among upper caste youths who feared a bleak future. Besides the Devi Lal's challenge, there was another reason why Mr. Singh was in such a hurry: his dilemma with the BJP. Mr. Singh had to depend on the BJP for his government's existence but at the same time, he could not afford to alienate the Muslims who constituted a lucrative "vote-bank". He tried to use the Mandal Commission recommendations as a weapon to divide the Hindu community on the basis of caste alignments, and thus, to pull the rug out from under the BJP. In other words, Mr. V.P. Singh tried to strike a blow to the confidence of the BJP, but in fact, he created a split in the party.¹

The "political animal" in Mr. Singh, however, was not content to bring the concept of caste back to the centre-stage in Indian society. He sprang yet another card with the same conflict potential: religion. In this case, too, the BJP factor was important. The party's poor performance in the municipal elections in Rajasthan where it had been sharing power with the JD, alarmed its president, Mr. L.K. Advani, who announced a

1. In the Bihar unit on November 23, 1990, several BJP MLAs defied the whip and voted in favour of the chief minister who was opposed by the party.

10,000-Km journey on *Ram- Rath* from September 25-29 to inject "self-confidence" in the Hindu community, though officially it was a mission to bring about "a resurgence of the national spirit." The BJP-VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) combine made it clear that, come what may, ceremonial construction (*Kar-Seva*) would start on the temple at the site of the Babri mosque at Ayodhya on October 30, 1990. The BJP also started dropping hints that it might withdraw support for the government on the issue, and in October Mr. Advani directly accused Mr. Singh, complaining that the prime minister "has not even thought about it."¹ Trapped in the tangle, Mr. V.P. Singh issued a special ordinance on October 18, empowering the government to acquire the disputed land at Ayodhya until the dispute was resolved by the Supreme Court of India. But ever loyal to his style, Mr. Singh withdrew the ordinance within 48 hours of its promulgation, arguing that neither the VHP, nor the BMAC (Babri Masjid Action Committee) agreed to accept it. Simultaneously, Mr. Singh was making pathetic appeals to all sides to prevent the downfall of the government, making it obvious that his style had reached its nadir and the "juggler of contradictions" was reduced to a hopeless figure.

The failure of Mr. V.P. Singh's survival tactics was precipitated by the ever-growing dissension in the JD, which reached alarming proportions in October. The sense of deprivation and revenge in Mr. Devi Lal, and Mr. Chandrashekhar produced a powerful combination based on the age-old principle in politics : 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. The two supremely ambitious, and influential leaders came together to achieve a common aim: dislodge Mr. V.P. Singh. The

1. *Statesman*, October 7, 1990.

support of only 47 MPs was needed to split the party, and 70 to reach an absolute majority within it. On 5 October 1990, 29 MPs, who belonged to the JD condemned Mr. Singh for his "all round failure", and asked him to resign immediately "in the interest of the country". One of the factors boosting the confidence of the JD dissidents was the assurance of the Congress-I that it would support an NF government if the "traitor" Mr. V.P. Singh was replaced, and the BJP forsaken. In fact, one of the consequences of Mr. Singh's tactfulness was its contribution to the revival of the Congress-I. After the NPE, the Congress leadership was at a loss to find ways to reconstitute the party, revitalise its spirit, and improve its image, especially with the NF and Mr. V.P. Singh riding a crest of popularity, and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi being ridiculed. But within ten months, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was "exhumed and revived" from his political grave largely because of Mr. Singh's "honeymoon with the public was probably the shortest lived of any recent prime minister."

This short obituary of the NF government, however, does not tell its story even in shorthand. Although, the government led by Mr. V.P. Singh was known an offspring of the National Front, it was actually Janata Dal that was in power. This party had been cobbled together over a long year without the glues of cohesion of personalities, and political visions. It was not a political party, nor a political movement. JD centred around the personality of Mr. V.P. Singh, and he himself hardly knew what kind of political leadership role destiny was going to cast on him. As a political leader, born in Allahabad by-election of 1988; before he was sworn in as prime minister, he could hardly campaign outside the Hindi belt, more precisely outside U.P.,

and Bihar. In fact, the electorate in 1989 returned a negative verdict of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi,¹ not a positive verdict for the NF.

Mr. V.P. Singh led what he himself described as a 'minority government with majority support'. He also led a coalition within a coalition. The larger coalition that provided the political scaffolding of the government in power-the triangle of the NF, BJP and the Left Front-was, as noted, a difficult and dynamic triangle. Mr. Singh, in his turn, behaved from the beginning as prime minister of a single majority party, not of a complex coalition that demanded constant nursing. His majority party leader style sprang either from his lack of knowledge and experience of how to run a coalition ministry or from his conviction that the government could not endure for long and the best thing for him to do was to assert his own political leadership of the nation rather than of a patchwork quilt coalition. He did not create an institutionalised mechanism to co-ordinate the views and perspectives of the three allied parties; the consultations that took place were mostly of an informal nature and often bilateral, between the ruling leadership, and one or the other of its two political allies.

Mr. V.P. Singh's principal fault in the eyes of the ruling elite was that he took the issues too seriously, and was not content with the gaining of the political power. In Kashmir, his sin was the appointment of Mr. Fernandes to explore the possibilities of opening a political dialogue with the militants even as Governor Jagmohan, whose appointment led the

1. The people felt cheated by Gandhi's worship of imported technologies whose glitter did not reach beyond the darling of the international corporate community-the 80 million or so strong Indian middle class that could buy consumer durable. Besides, his imperial style of politics demeaned the entire herd of Congressmen-cabinet minister, chief ministers and party functionaries.

resignation of Mr. Farooq Abdullah as chief minister, pursued his tough line as per the wishes of not just the BJP, but almost the entire ruling elite. His second sin was that he was inclined to hold a dialogue with Mr. S.S. Mann, and his group in Punjab, and yield some passage to the militants, giving them a chance to return to the fold of India's mainstream politics. He began to 'appease' the Muslims and even the tribals of Bihar, who were demanding a state of their own. He started repairing some of the heavily damaged democratic institutions like the judiciary. He allowed chief ministers to govern in their respective states, and central ministers to run their respective ministries. In less than ten months, he was able to get through both houses of the Parliament, the Prasar Bharati Bill, making the electronic media autonomous, if not truly independent. He placed all land reform acts in the 9th schedule of the Constitution, and promised to nudge the state governments from 1991 to implement the legislations. And finally-perish the thought-he began to implement the report of the Mandal Commission. All this was far more than the Congress-I, BJP, and indeed those who saw themselves as the builders, and owners of the national power structures could take without feeling deeply threatened.

(d) The Exit:

October 23, 1990 became a landmark date when BJP President Mr. Advani was arrested on his way to participate in the projected temple construction work at Ayodhya, and the party withdrew its support from the government. A week later Mr. Advani, conforming that the parting of ways was final, issued a statement from Massanjore, where he was detained, asserting that the BJP had "some fundamental differences" with the NF,

that by its manner of governance "had made it clear that [the party] must go."¹ On November 7, 1990 in what was nothing but a foregone conclusion, the Lok Sabha rejected the motion of confidence brought by the speaker with 346 votes cast against Mr. V.P. Singh, and only 142 in favour. The Left steadfastly stuck to Mr. Singh, but the its number in Lok Sabha prevented it from influencing the outcome. As expected the JD dissidents led by Mr. Devi Lal and Mr. Chandrashekhar, the Congress-I, and the BJP voted against Mr. Singh. The vote marked the formal unmaking of the government and the culmination of the process that had started even before the Ninth Parliamentary Elections(NPE).

(II) THE CHANDRASHEKHAR INTERLUDE

In what may be termed as one of the greatest show of opportunism even by the standards of Indian politics, the 54 member breakaway group of the JD, christening itself Janata Dal (Socialist), formed a minuscule government at the Centre with the support of the Congress-I, and its allies. With 211 members supporting the motley group from outside, Mr. Chandrashekhar's rump government earned the dubious distinction: it emerged as India's first living example of the proverbial tail wagging the dog. By all political logic, Mr. Chandrashekhar's government was bound to fall. Once Mr. Rajiv Gandhi took revenge against Mr. Singh, it simply remained a question of him choosing the right time to go to the polls by withdrawing support for the

1. The truth is that the BJP faced a deep internal crisis as a result of its support to the government in league with the communists. Its grassroots support base was in a state of rebellion. Bajrang Dal, RSS, VHP and other, by June, threatened to disown BJP if it continued to be the member of the triangular alliance. In 1990, it faced the spectre of a dual role", BJP could not remain an ally of NF government and still maintain its identity as the pioneer builder of Hindu India. The Ayodhya issue in connivance with the selective implementation of the Mandal Commission's report conferred a political justification of the decision already taken in June.

government. The view was widely held that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi would be calling the shots as he was formally back with all prominence on November 10, 1990, when the hopelessly dependent Mr. Chandrashekhar assumed the mantle of prime minister. Developments, however, show that this view underestimated the potential of Mr. Chandrashekhar.

(a) Formation of the Cabinet:

It was in cabinet formation, a process of supreme importance in the parliamentary system, that Mr. Chandrashekhar showed signs of success with his "method". Two important politicians, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the chief ministers of Gujarat and U.P., respectively, became its first casualties. The prime minister gave a tremendous boost to their egos by going out of his way to make them feel that their advice was going to be decisive in the formation of the cabinet. This illusion made them pledge wholehearted and much-needed support to Mr. Chandrashekhar. Ultimately, however, 20 of the 32 cabinet members were strong supporters of the prime minister. Mr. Yadav's nominee was made railway minister instead of getting the prestigious post of home minister that had been sought for him, and Mr. Patel could accommodate only one of his supporters. Mr. Chandrashekhar also saw to it that none of the former supporters of Mr. V.P. Singh, who later shifted to him, and helped him become prime minister, would get the posts to which they had aspired. Thus, Mr. V.C. Shukla who coveted the Energy Ministry was made foreign minister, Mr. R.M. Pandey became human resource development minister, rather than his objective of home minister, and Mr. Sanjay Singh wanted either the Finance or Commerce portfolio, but had to be content with communications.

Thus, by "a deft combination of the illusion of consultations and vague assurances (Mr. Chandrashekhar) managed to obtain his allies' consent on a few specific names but left the portfolios, and the status of the ministers to be appointed open."¹

Even Mr. Devi Lal, failed to match Mr. Chandrashekhar. The two leaders became close allies, while drawing up the game plan against Mr. Singh. During the period from Mr. Devi Lal's exit from the NF to immediately before formation of the new government, Mr. Chandrashekhar repeatedly stressed the "invaluable advice" and "indispensability" of Mr. Devi Lal. Thus, Mr. Devi Lal fell victim to the illusion, that he would be pulling the strings in the new government. But Mr. Chandrashekhar hit Mr. Devi Lal, arguably the foremost exponent of clan politics in India, where it hurts most : the unending feud between Mr. Chautala and Mr. Ranjit Singh, Mr. Devi Lal's two sons. Mr. Chandrashekhar took advantage of this, and started favouring the former at the expense of the latter, leaving Mr. Devi Lal a helpless and bewildered spectator. It is interesting to note that Mr. Chandrashekhar was so confident of his ability that in his bid to accommodate Mr. D.R. Saran, a nominee of Mr. Chautala, he succeeded in keeping Mr. Jagdeep Dhankar, and Mr. Chand Ram, Mr. Lal's nominees, out of the cabinet. The greatest paradox associated with Mr. Chandrashekhar's rise to the top leadership position was, that once the turmoil of caste war, and communalism had subsided with Mr. V.P.Singh's exit, and the installation of a new prime minister, the Chandrashekhar government seemed to have lost the rationale for its existence.

1. *India Today*, December 15, 1990.

(b) Congress-I as the "Sandbag":

Mr. Chandrashekhar had devised novel tactics to dispel the growing impression that as prime minister he had been "living on borrowed time since Day One."¹ These tactics were essentially an outcome of his "method": to use the Congress-I as the "sandbag"—to pass the responsibility for acts of opportunism, and policy failure, on the one hand and, on the other, to take sole credit for himself for acts that generated some public appreciation. One can cite, for instance, Mr. Chandrashekhar's dismissal of the governments of Assam and Tamil Nadu, very controversial decisions that were generally explained by his "pathetic dependence" on the Congress-I, which was in a position to dictate terms to him. While it is true that both the state government had an anti-Congress-I stance— the Assam government being constituted by the AGP and Tamil Nadu by the D.M.K., both constituents parties of the NF . It is also a fact that both were equally against Chandrashekhar. In dismissing the Tamil Nadu government, in particular, Mr. Chandrashekhar adopted such a confrontational stance, that he did not even want the report of the governor on the failure or breakdown of administrative machinery in the state. By the act of dismissal, he like Mr. Rajeev Gandhi, took revenge against his political opponent, but tactically, he left the impression that the act was dictated by the Congress, which was made to take the major responsibility for " violation of domestic norms"—the dismissal of two duly elected governments.

On equally controversial issue of refuelling the U.S. Air Force planes in India during the Gulf War, the Congress-I began complaining heavily against Chandrashekhar's decision to

1. S. Nihal Singh : "Congress: The Heavy Price of Propping Up Chandrashekhar", *Telegraph*, February 8, 1991.

provide the facility. The Congress was supported by all the political parties, except the BJP, which adopted a pro-U.S. stance. Initially, the NF government was blamed for decision to allow the refuelling and Mr. Chandrashekhar defended himself by saying that he was merely continuing the policy of his predecessor. But when the Congress-I, in a mood to embarrass Mr. Chandrashekhar, intensified its public criticism of the government's Gulf policy, as well as its foreign policy as a whole, he played a key role in a disclosure, that the aircraft refuelling facility, and the ports of call for the U.S. Navy had been provided by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi while he was prime minister. Even if Mr. Chandrashekhar later withdrew the refuelling facility in face of the severe public protest, he did it only after the impression had gained ground that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was the main culprit.

Mr. Chandrashekhar also succeeded in putting the Congress-I on the defensive regarding the policy to be pursued *vis-à-vis* the BJP and the Left. While the prime minister favoured associating both the "crutches" in the decision-making process on issues of national importance, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi found in this - and not without valid reason - an implicit motive to come to terms with the BJP, and the Left on the basis of anti-Congressism. But what is more important here is that by his opposition to the involvement of the BJP, and the Left at a time when Mr. Chandrashekhar was expressing his determination to include them, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, in the popular perception, became self-centred.

His handling of the Bofors issue is perhaps, the best illustration of Mr. Chandrashekhar's game plan to make the Congress -I a scapegoat. Immediately after becoming prime minister and still in dire need for the support of the Congress -I

to prove his majority in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Chandrashekhar had refused to attach any importance to the Bofors investigation, dismissing it as "a job for the sub-inspector" But having won the vote of confidence, he suddenly found a keen interest in the investigation. To the Congress dismay, Mr. Chandrashekhar took a leading role in reactivating the moribund enquiry that was being conducted by the CBI and establishing contact with the Swiss authorities requesting them to expedite matters.

As already shown, some of the government's acts contributed to the goodwill among the people. Its success in diplomatic negotiation was evident in securing of two loans - one of \$ 1.02 billion and another of \$ 780 million- from the IMF. It succeeded in keeping the VHP and BMAC in check by convincing them of the need to continue a dialogue on the temple-mosque issue, and its willingness to initiate talk with the militants of Punjab and Kashmir was also appreciated in some quarters. In foreign affairs, Mr. Chandrashekhar broke the embarrassing silence, that had been maintained by the V.P. Singh government and adopted the masterly practice of the "criticising but not condemning" the Iraqi invasion. The point, however, should not be overemphasised. To an analyst interested in a balance assessment, the policies and acts that generated approval among the people may tell a different story. The IMF loans were sanctioned with some stiff condition. The deadlock on the mosque issue continued and there has had been no sweeping change in the Punjab and Kashmir scenes. The government also came under severe criticism for not letting India play a "leader's role" in diffusing the Gulf Crisis and not taking the opportunity to revive the then moribund Non-aligned Movement. Still the fact remains that to many Indian who found it difficult to avoid a

comparison between Mr. V. P. Singh and Mr. Chandrashekhar, the later was "the better of the two evils". It must be noted that Mr. Chandrashekhar took full advantage of the comparison, as when he spoke on his "achievements": "I do not claim to have done big things, but when I came there was a lot of tension and turmoil in society. That has been eased."¹

At this point, it is necessary to explain how and why Mr. Chandrashekhar dared to use the Congress-I, the oxygen cylinder of his government, as the "sandbag". This is especially important because as far as January 31, 1991, the Congress-I Working Committee had decided to follow a strategy of distancing the party from the government. Mr. Chandrashekhar's calculation was based on the fact that the Congress-I was in a peculiar position. It did not want to form a government at the Centre without having contested another election, and political conditions were not conducive to facing the electorate immediately. Even if some Congressmen such as Mr. Vasant Sathe, and Mr. Dinesh Singh tried to coax Mr. Rajiv Gandhi into forming a government by engineering defections from other parties (keeping in mind the need to reach the ever elusive majority), Rajiv Gandhi himself was against the idea. Another act of convenience, that is, formation of a government by manipulation of the mandate, would have destroyed the golden opportunity the Congress-I found to retrieve its political prospects. Also the Congress-I could not really afford another election immediately because the party was not confident of securing enough seats to form a government of its own. So, the constraints of the Congress-I became a boon for Mr. Chandrashekhar.

1. *Telegraph*, March 6, 1991.

(c) The Fall:

As noted, this 'stormy marriage of convenience' had to come to an end; indeed, a senior Congressman had predicted immediately after the installation of the Chandrashekhar's government that "we will sit back.... and make occasional noises till March. Just before the budget we will begin to make a noise."¹ Mr. Chandrashekhar's operating style had stretched the patience of the Congress-I to an extreme point. Moreover, it would have been unrealistic to expect the Congress, a party so used to governing India, to continue indefinitely in a situation where it neither shared power nor assumed the role of the opposition.

While Mr. Rajiv Gandhi continued to hint that the party would tolerate the Chandrashekhar government until at least June-July, he was, simultaneously, looking for opportunities to embarrass the prime minister and interestingly, two constables from Haryana provided the opportunity. "Discovering" them in front of his residence, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi raised a hue and cry, accusing the government of placing him under surveillance. In its zeal to maximise political benefits, the Congress-I threatened to boycott the rest of the Lok Sabha session, unless Mr. Chandrashekhar took immediate action against the chief minister and home minister of Haryana. When Chandrashekhar refused, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi led a boycott of the important parliamentary session that was to pass the interim Union Budget (1991-1992), the interim railway budget, and accompanying money bills. Without the support of the Congress, the hopelessly minority government was sure to lose in any contest of strength. When the Congress-I continued the boycott, despite the assurances by Mr. Chandrashekhar, that a probe would be

1. *India Today*, November 30, 1990.

instituted on the surveillance issue, the prime minister decided to resign on March 5, 1991, the second consecutive day of the boycott by his supporting party. He also recommended, the dissolution of the Ninth Lok Sabha to the president of India, who asked him to continue in office until the next government was formed after a new parliamentary election.

But even in his resignation, Mr. Chandrashekhar emerged as the winner. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's primary intention had been to embarrass the prime minister, and in this, he was contemplating a scenario where as desperate Chandrashekhar would plead for help and, on being refused, would decide to resign only to be saved by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, at the last moment. But Mr. Chandrashekhar was in no mood to oblige Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. After achieving his ambition of becoming prime minister, he was now bent on retrieving his young Turk image— "unbridled, irreverent, and patently anti-Congress"¹ and he did it with finesse. Even in advising the president to dissolve Lok Sabha, he precluded the probability of realignments to "fix" yet another government by other political parties.

(B)
THE CENTRE-TRAPPED IN POLITICAL
EXHAUSTION OF DUBIOUS MANOEUVRES
STEEPED IN THE CHIMERA OF
ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATION

(I) FIVE YEARS OF CONGRESS (I) REGIME:

On June 21, 1991— incidentally, the year's longest day— Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao was sworn in as India's ninth prime minister, a week short of his seventieth birthday. As he took the oath of office, and secrecy under the glittering chandeliers of

1. *Telegraph*, March 7, 1991.

Rashtrapati Bhavan's Ashoka Hall, he also became, after Mr. L.B. Shastri, the first Congressman outside Nehru-Gandhi family to hold this high office.

Another first that P.V. chalked up was not as enviable Mrs. Indira Gandhi had run, for nearly two years, a minority government in New Delhi, a direct result of the Congress split in 1969, caused by her own drive to establish her supremacy in the party, and country. In the preceding general election, two years earlier, the Congress had won a working, though narrow, majority. Mr. Rao's mandate was to make a minority government work from the word go. And that, too, in circumstances infinitely more daunting than in the late sixties, or indeed at any other time since Independence. A crippling economic crunch, proliferating social conflicts, Pakistan-backed secessionism, and terrorism in Kashmir, and Punjab, and an international milieu in which foreign interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations was becoming permissible under certain circumstances, have had ensured that.

Mr. Rao's minority government was the unavoidable consequence of the three-way political divide-between the Congress, the BJP and the loose combination of the National Front, with the JD as its core and the Left Front-resulting from the painfully prolonged tenth general election. The logic of this situation should normally have been a coalition of the Congress, the largest party in the Lok Sabha though lacking a clear majority, and either the entire NF-LF combine or such constituents of it as might have been willing to share power, and responsibility with the Congress on the basis of an agreed programme. But old habits die hard. The idea of coalition was not even considered. The Congress, long used of going it alone, was averse to being encumbered with partners, with a taste for

back seat driving. Within the NF-LF group, especially within the JD, some leaders did crave a coalition with the Congress. They were outnumbered, however, by those opposed to the idea, at least partly for the sound reason, that the opposition space should not be allowed to be monopolised by the BJP which is anathema, as much to the two Fronts as to the Congress.

Although, on June 21, 1991 there were intimations, if not of buoyancy, then at least of mild optimism in Delhi's highly polluted air, buttressed by two powerful props. In the first place, there was the dread, shared by all political parties of the ordeal of yet another untimely election. The CPI leader, Mr. Inderjit Gupta, put the matter graphically when he declared : "If we go to the people to ask for their votes in the near future, they will give us a shoe beating". Secondly, and more importantly, hope had blossomed across the country that all concerned had learnt the necessary lessons from the voters' verdict in favour of a triangular balance. Mr. Narasimha Rao's sage statement, that the Congress would have opted for national consensus, even if, it had secured a comfortable majority in Parliament, boosted this belief. So did the promises of "constructive opposition" by the two major groupings on the other side of the political fence-the BJP and its allies and the NF-LF combination.

What Mr. Rao created during the first year of his premiership was not much the beginning of a legacy, but a change in atmospherics. The legacy was, in fact, inherited. Terrorism and separatism in Punjab and Kashmir. Fractious party bosses. A nation that had overspent itself into bankruptcy and become an international basket case. The Mandal and Mandir issues on a back-burner, but still simmering. What the nation needed was a lowering of temperatures, in effect, a pacification programme with a simultaneous brave new thrust

into the global market to get into the economic race along with the rest of the Asian Tigers including rapidly modernising China.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mr. Shyama Charan Shukla says Mr. Rao had a "quietly pushy" way of doing things. "He is certainly not flamboyant or vociferous, but he does a lot of good things without making much noise."¹ And this appeared to be his great advantage during his early days. Despite his having held the posts of chief minister, home minister and foreign minister, Mr. Rao simply avoided direct confrontation and unpleasantness. And he quietly sold his what-do-I-have-to-lose attitude to the party and country. After all, when he was anointed consensus prime minister, following the power struggle that broke out after Rajiv's assassination, he had packed his bags and was off to retirement in his native village.

But many of his close advisers readily admit that behind the facade lay a man addicted to power whose manipulative capabilities, perhaps, outmatched even those of Mrs. Gandhi. It is perhaps, for this reason – Mr. Rao's penchant for posturing – that he is perceived as a schemer whose concrete achievements domestically and internationally are viewed as attempts at self-aggrandisement that would raise his stature within the party to ward off potential challengers, rather than as deserving of accolades on their own. And this need not have been so, but for Rao's style.²

After all, who can grudge Mr. Rao's very solid achievement in risking elections in Punjab even as most of the country seemed opposed to them, and terrorists threatened to stymie them at the point of the gun. And then his generous backing to the then chief minister Mr. Beant Singh and his police chief Mr.

1. *India Today*, 21 April, 1992, p.19, op. cit.

2. Seema Mushtafa : "Narasimha Rao and his Politics", *Mainstream*, March 16, 1996, pp. 23-24.

K.P.S. Gill that restored virtual normalcy to a state that had been written-off as an ulcer that would perennially bleed. The mild mannered *idli-sambhar* Brahmin obviously had a tougher edge to him, than anybody could have imagined.

He showed a similar guts and grits attitude in his unswerving backing for Dr. Manmohan Singh and his financial reforms. Before the 1992 budget session, Mr. Rao faced flak not only from the Left, but from stalwarts within his own party, particularly Mr. Arjun Singh and Mr. Balram Jakhar, who suddenly began to question the reversal of the economic policies of the past four decades and began to criticise IMF-backed stringencies. The early economic miracle that seemed to be transforming India, figured on the cover of *The Economist* and hardly bears repeating—the country began to emerge from its recession, exports grew, the trade-gap narrowed, inflation dipped from the 14% figure it had reached in 1991 and by the end of 1993, forex reserves were a record \$ 7.4 billion compared to \$ 2.2 billion in 1991.

Mr. Rao appeared to be scoring. His low-key but stable approach to reorient Indian foreign policy in the post-cold war era led to the recognition of Israel, the South Africa initiative, and successful border talks with China. And internationally, India scored one of its greatest diplomatic successes against Pakistan on the Kashmir issue when Mrs. Benazir Bhutto's Government was forced into a humiliating withdrawal while calling upon the UN Human Rights Commission to chastise India for abuses in the Valley.

Mr. Rao's Kashmir policy has had its ups and downs and is laced with instances of calumny and deceit such as pitting home minister Mr. S.B. Chauhan and Mr. Rajesh Pilot against each other on the political approach to the Valley, promising Mr.

Farooq Abdullah that "sky was the limit" in terms of discussions on autonomy, and then backing down, and the Charar-e-Sharief disaster. But his determination to hold elections in the Valley – if people participate on their own freewill–could have been the biggest set-bak to Pakistan-backed terrorism.

While Mrs. Gandhi made populist sloganeering the mainstay of her political appeal, Rajiv Gandhi depended on advertising gimmicks, and Mr. V.P. Singh promoted casteism in the name of "social justice", there is no gainsaying that Mr. Rao – in keeping with world trends–did try to raise economics to the level of the main political agenda of the nation. But, his success was only partial because of his personality. He was not a communicator and no crowd-puller like Rajiv Gandhi. Congressmen quip that he was actually a "crowd-pusher". "He did very well for the country, but badly for the party. He brought stability when the conditions were not conducive, but his political manoeuvres were too much of a fraud. His failure is that he tried to exercise the tactics of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi without possessing their charisma."¹

As a result, he was left with no real party managers who could market his bursts of successes. Mr. Rao had been a failure at selling himself, and he had nobody with a credible national face willing to sell him to the public. He will never be able to escape the harshest historical denunciation on the Ayodhya issue. His secret dealings with the Sangh brotherhood before the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 simply exposed his image as a loner and manipulator, and brought into disrepute his earlier image of a statesman and consensus builder.

1. Op. cit. V.N. Subba Rao, *The Economic Times*, May 31, 1996.

In his dealings with the RSS, and in the confidence he displayed about solving the problem in the courts, even as his own political advisers and intelligence agencies were telling Mr. Rao not to trust the assurances of the Kalyan Singh government and to dismiss him immediately, ultimately became the precursors of the worst communal divide that convulsed the entire nation with a violent fury unknown since the Partition. But the obsession to survive far outweighed any contrition or remorse he may have harboured. Instead of offering to resign after his Himalayan blunder, he took refuge in self-pity by blaming the BJP for "perfidy" and took hasty steps such as dismissing all BJP state government. Mr. Rao had never believed in anti-BJP-ism as a credo. And ironically, it was the BJP that bailed out his minority government during the early days by joining forces with him in the election of the Lok Sabha Speaker.

In the process, he lost not only the Muslim vote bank, which seemed to have been veering back towards the party in 1991, but also the support of the opposition parties, which till then, supported his government under the 'consensus' garb. He embroiled himself, instead, in retaining his chair. His reputation as an indecisive national leader was then etched in history.

After surviving Ayodhya, Mr. Rao developed a thick skin towards prime-ministerial accountability-politically towards his own party, and constitutionally towards the nation-even as his party and senior colleagues became involved in scandal after scandal, and lost important power bases in the South and the West in state assembly elections. As Mr. L.K. Advani said : "The absence of governance will continue even as government survives."

The chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka – Mr. N. Janardhana Reddy and Mr. S. Bangarappa – were implicated in corruption charges, but, Mr. Rao refused to take any action against them. It was only after the Supreme court passed strictures against Mr. Reddy that Mr. Rao dropped him. In the case of Mr. Bangarappa, too, he vacillated for months before sacking him. On another front, the Joint Parliamentary Committee report on the stock scam indicted Mr. B. Shankaranand and recommended a deeper probe into the Goldstar company involving Mr. Rao's son, Prabhakar Rao. Mr. Shankaranand was dropped only after a massive assertion of strength by the opposition in Parliament. The sugar scandal, the Harshed Mehta charges, his involvement with Chandraswamy in the St. Kitts case: Mr. Rao survived them all because the CBI was always a political puppet of the prime minister

The hawala scandal is a historical landmark. For the first time, prominent cabinet ministers and later two governors, were forced to resign. For the first time, the Supreme Court, in what was an unprecedented body blow to the office of the prime minister, acted decisively to take the CBI's jurisdiction away from the prime minister. Opinion polls showed that the public approved the Supreme Court's activism and, by implication this was a demonstration of a lack of faith in Mr. Rao. And moreover, the P.M.O. received another institutional jolt when President Shankar Dayal Sharma rejected two government ordinances in November, 1995.

In most modern democracies, a prime minister would have resigned under such assaults. But, Mr. Rao proved to be a ultimate hanger-on, surviving by causing divisions within his own party as well as manipulating its creaky structure to his advantage. He used his innate knowledge of the party to concentrate power in himself. The 1996 parliamentary verdict

should, logically, have been the straw that broke the camel's back. His disastrous alliance with Ms. Jayalalita, among other things, showed a woeful mishandling of a party, frittering away its advantages, and by default helping the BJP to emerge as the single largest party. But Mr. Rao bounced back as the party's parliamentary chief again. The process of Rao-ising the party began at Tirupati in April, 1992, when following the CWC elections, he displayed his insecurity—the hallmark of a second-rate leadership, and forced newly elected members like Mr. Sharad Pawar, Mr. Arjun Singh and Mr. Rajesh Pilot to resign.

That Mr. Rao deliberately prevented any new leaders from emerging—notwithstanding the fact, that they were friends or foes— is visibly demonstrable. During his entire five-year tenure, the Congress did not constitute the eight-member parliamentary board, which takes all crucial decisions on legislative matters. Nor did he allowed the emergence of the traditional 15-member Central Election Committee, which makes the final decision on ticket distribution for elections. He conducted party affairs, instead, by using the CWC, the PCCs and the chief ministers over whom he wielded absolute control. He used these bodies to nominate candidates of his choice for the Rajya Sabha or for state assemblies in order to buy personal loyalty. And extended CWC meetings were convened only to “pass-one-line resolutions” authorising the “party president” to take the appropriate actions on all party matters.

And he continued to exploit this intra-party structure for further self-aggrandisement. For example, in January 1995, when he expelled Mr. Arjun Singh from the party, he convened an extended CWC meeting to endorse his decision. During the course of this, he orchestrated a resolution authorising him to restructure the party right from the AICC level to the top.

Commented a general secretary of the AICC: "Rao is now even more powerful than Indira Gandhi ever was."

He consolidated not only his grip over the party, but also established a stranglehold over the government with a vengeance. Following Mr. Arjun Singh's resignation from the government, the Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs (CCPA)—consisting of prime minister, home minister, finance minister and defence minister—ceased to function. The CCPA is the policy making politburo of the government. Mr. Rao also kept the all powerful Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) with himself, appointing his personal secretary Mr. A. N. Verma as its chairman. For three years, he retained the key portfolios of industry, foreign affairs and defence before farming them out.

No matter that he may have been called a knave, a hustler, a ditherer, a destroyer, Mr. Rao's petulantly pouting intransigence even as he spearheaded his ruling party into one of its most disastrous electoral debacles in a general election was simultaneously a demonstration of his crystal-ball reading of the political ethos of his own party as well as a display of "self preservation masquerading as stability." In the mid- 1996, he finished his full term with party and the government in a shambles. The taste that lingers after these five years was not that of a person, who made some spectacular foreign policy moves, heralded India into the globalisation era, hesitantly opened up more freedom on T.V., flooded country with consumer durable, brought peace to Punjab, but that of a politically amoral and hidebound survivor who would make sure that if he sank, so too his ship, instead of helping it to bail it out. History is unlikely to forgive him for Ayodhya. For that is the metaphor by which he will be judged. It says all about him— a deal-maker and projected his indecisiveness, and lack of assertive leadership as qualities of

calibrated wisdom. As Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav says, the only thing he mastered was the "art of saying nothing on the most vital issues concerning the country". And he will also be remembered as the long rope artist whose noose tightened, ironically against him and his own party.

The images that remain indelible are the psychic intangibles of Mr. Rao's uncanny ability to survive the vicissitudes of public opinion, party revolts, electoral reversals, programmatic setbacks, and institutional assaults on the style of his helmsman-ship. Even since the seventies, Indian prime ministers, after Mrs. Gandhi's rise to the pinnacle of power in 1971, have lasted an average of about two and a half years. Even an elementary reading of the political abacus should have given Mr. Rao no more than a year. But the septuagenarian from the Andhra Pradesh simply rearranged all those neatly strung beads and wove them into a spider web of survival. According to F.D. Vakil, professor of political science, Osmania University, "Rao is a modern Chanakya who practised village politics at the national level. The lasting legacy is the remarkable demonstration of how a minority can survive in the Indian political process through a full term by tackling day-to-day issues instead of considering wider questions. Most often his decisions were to create a climate of indecision."

(IV) THE BJP'S BOLD GAMBLE- SHORT-LIVED HONEYMOON:

The Eleventh General Election's mandate certainly made inevitable what has come to be known as 'politics of compulsion'. No party got the majority to get the right to form the government automatically on its own. The BJP-led bloc commanded a strength of 195 in the 543-members Lok Sabha (of which elections were held for 537 seats). While, the BJP on its own had 160 seats, Akali Dal 8, and Harayana Vikas party 3. The

President Mr. S.D. Sharma invited Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP to form the next government on the principle that his was the largest single party in the Lok Sabha, strictly obeying the "obligatory rule" and he can hardly be faulted on that score. Mr. Vajpayee was asked "to secure a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha by 31 May, 1996."

For a party with the reputation of long term calibrated political thinking, short-term opportunistic grabs of power were supposed to be part of the culture of the Congress and the Third Front. By this yardstick, the BJP's controversial decision to form a government while still in minority was not so much an aberration, as a political gamble it had never taken before. Goaded on, initially, by its cadres and most senior leaders, the party decided to take the do-or-die plunge in the hope that Congress-I would split after its crushing defeat, the National Front and the Left parties, known for their fractious and ever-splitting past, would stay divided and the rise of new and uncommitted regional groupings would never get their act together. It had hoped that it would gain heavily from this confusion, and even attract secular allies by watering down some of its more stringent Hindutva rhetoric on issues such, as Article 370 and a uniform civil code. One advantage of a BJP government at the Centre would be the leverage it could exercise in states like U.P., where assembly elections were due before the year was out.

Meanwhile, Congress Working Committee (CWC) members enraged and shockingly, spitted fire against the party president Mr. Rao for his "historic lapse", in not conveying to the President the decision of the CWC to back the Gowda-led Government well in time as a result of which, the President appointed Mr. Vajpayee as the Prime Minister. On 10 May, 1996, in the sworn-

in-ceremony, the Rashtrapati Bhavan witnessed frayed tempers, and transgression of protocol as leaders of the newly formed Third Front called on President to protest against his invitation to the BJP to form a government at the Centre.

After the Vajpayee Government was placed in power, the BJP found itself wedged between a rock and a hard place, and with the emergence of an unexpected unity in the opposition after Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda was elected as the leader of the Third Front, and Congress-I's support to them, the party suddenly discovered it had taken a leap not knowing where it would land. Sources in the party say it was Mr. Vajpayee himself who had taken this decision, despite his pre-poll assertion that the party would not be a contender for forming a government if its tally was less than 215. One explanation that the BJP leaders offered for Mr. Vajpayee's flip-flop is that at the time he accepted the presidential invitation, he was unaware of the unconditional support given by the Congress-I to Mr. Gowda.

In its 13 days in power, the BJP Government's ministers, many of them first timers, did not let the fact that their government lacked the parliamentary legitimacy stop them from taking important decisions, or making policy pronouncements. The clearance given to the Enron-Dhabol Project and radical clandestine decision for the Pokharan-II underlines this fact. Besides, the party sought to promote its interest through the reinstatement of the Srikrishna Commission, and the attempted exoneration of its President Mr. Advani. Mr. Vajpayee and his ministers made tactical moves to ensure that his party had an impressive score-card, even if the Government did not last long.

By May 28, however, it was clear to everybody that the arithmetic of the Lok Sabha was against the BJP government getting the confidence vote. After a fierce debate, Mr. Vajpayee chose to resign from the office instead of facing the vote on the floor of the house. Thus, the curtain came-down on the shortest-ever and first BJP government at the Centre. The party lost face as never before and was branded as naive or guilty of gratuitous political hubris, though the shortest serving Prime Minister left with a flourish, impressing many even in defeat. On the question that everyone knew that he had not the majority, so on what did he exactly banking on, he said that : "When the President invited him, the political situation was fluid. The regional parties were keeping their options open. BJP wanted to make an honest effort to form the government in the light of the people's mandate, with the help of the regional parties on the basis of a common minimum programme." This statement by Mr. Vajpayee, a vouched votary of the politics of consensus, and regarded as the lone dove among hawks, in course of the parliamentary debate on May 28, was somewhat consolation of the bold, but ill conceived gamble that saved the BJP from total public condemnation which in two years times would help the party to relish the taste of relatively much more stable coalition game at the Centre.

(V) THE UNITED FRONT (UF) IN A BIRDCAGE

Soon after Mr. Vajpayee tendered his resignation from prime ministership, after passing through the BJP's moment of cold isolation for nearly a fortnight, the President called upon Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda to form the government as the leader of the United Front (UF), i.e. combination of National Front and Left Front, a coalition of 13 parties, and the Congress with 140 MPs

supporting it from outside.¹ Mr. Gowda formed his cabinet with 11 ministers and 13 minister of states on 1st June, 1996.

The Congress-(I) had to concede the leadership of the non-BJP coalition of Mr. Gowda for these reasons. First, the Congress had been defeated at the polls, and had lost the moral right to lead the successor government. Secondly, Mr. Rao, the then president of the party, had fought the election more against the Congress, than against the BJP. In the name of keeping the communal forces out of power, there should have been a coalition of Congress, the JD and the regional parties, but this move could have thrown Mr. Rao out of the Congress, holding him fully responsible for the worst debacle. Thirdly, number of its VIPs and VVIPs, celebrities had been found in an unprecedented number of mega-corruption charges.

(a) Nature of the UF:

On June 12, the Gowda government secured a vote of confidence from the Lok Sabha (a voice vote) after a long debate. In the changed political scenario – a competitive multi-party system being the order of national politics, the UF representing thirteen different political parties, claimed to be a coalition of different forces of the regions. Its perception was that in the country like India, the Central Government has to be a coalition, and the UF was an explicit, and visible coalition like that of the Congress party. According to Mr. Jaipal Reddy, then official spokesman of the UF, “the UF today is in a comparison to Nehru’s Indian National Congress. It is trying to prove power-sharing among various linguistic, religious and social groups

1. The Congress preferred Gowda to Jyoti Basu, who was the UF first choice for the top job, but was prevented from taking it by a majority of his own party’s Central Committee.

through quota system. All the operational decisions are taken by the cabinet.”¹ In his view, the UF was a resurrection of the National Front (NF) and the Left Front (LF) combine which had worked together more than seven years ago to represent itself as the “third alternative.” The plus point this time with the UF was that there were no prime ministerial rivals as in the past and it hoped to resolve its internal problems with consultations and dialogue.²

The rationale behind the formation of the UF was to create a bandwagon of secular forces *vis-à-vis* the BJP. Through the campaign that preceded the poll, the target was the communal stand of the BJP and the corrupt rule of the Congress-I. Most of the constituents of the UF including the CPI joined the government. The CPM had not joined it, but wielded considerable influence with the government because of its strength in Lok Sabha.

(b) Achievements:

The UF fashioned a guiding document, entitled - *A Common Approach to Major Policy Matters and A Minimum Programme*. This document among other things, promised to revitalise federalism, empower “the weaker sections of the society”, support secularism, improve infrastructure and increase spending on basic human needs such as drinking water, primary health care, and housing. Though the Minimum Programme carefully skirted the contentious issues of economic liberalisation, it nevertheless, affirmed the importance of pushing macroeconomic policies designed to produce high growth. It also made clear that the government would attempt to discourage

1. *The Times of India*, 11 June, 1996.

2. *India Today*, 15 June, 1996.

foreign direct investment (FDI) in low priority areas, but nevertheless underscored the importance of attracting foreign investment.¹ Spelling out such programme was essential for prevention of the vicious internecine conflicts in the routine administration of the government.

Despite several ups and downs, the UF government undertook many programmes. It encouraged co-operative federalism. The problems of the state received utmost attention. Inter-State Council was revived. The tax share to the states was increased. It worked for the restoration of normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir. The UF constituents achieved an attitudinal convergence in defence of federal polity, and used their leverage in the UF to restore a genuine federal balance.²

Many of the constituent parties of the Front had some social policy successes, i.e. mid-day meal scheme, integrated with mother and child-care, the Rs. two a kilo-rice scheme, and the modest social security wage policy, free primary education, etc. It is true that the UF government partially fulfilled the promises made in the CMP, efforts made in the direction of bringing Lokpal Bill putting the PM within the ambit of the proposed Lokpal's scrutiny, electoral reforms, 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill giving 30% of the seats to women

1. See "United Front's Policy Statement," as reprinted in *Mainstream*, (June 15, 1996), pp. 13-19. For an analysis of the programme, see Sanjay Baru: "UF's Common Approach: From Patchwork to Rainbow Coalition", *Times of India*, (June 7, 1996), p.12.

2. The four regional parties won a major concession from the other partners in the UF on their demand to constitute a Federal Front, consisting of the DMK, the TMC, the TDP, and the AGP, with 58 MPs at its disposal (as compared to the JD and the SPs combined strength of 60). Explaining the rationale of the Federal Front, Chandrababu Naidu of the TDP observed: 'From the beginning all state parties wanted to form a separate front. Our problems are different from those of others. Hence, we have constituted ourselves into a separate front'. Significantly, the Federal Front's programme was added to the UF's common minimum programme later.

in the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies, uncompromising stand on CTBT, releasing developmental schemes for rural areas, granting statehood to Uttarakhand, holding elections in J&K etc. are noteworthy.

(c) Contradictions and Differences:

Apart from the problem posed by Mr. Sitaram Kesri, the new President of the Congress, who has been warning the UF not to take his party's support for "granted", the differences and misunderstanding, which had cropped up among the UF constituents, posed a hanging sword of Damocles over the future of the UF Government. The UF brought together parties, which may have anchorage in states, but cannot be thereby categorised as 'regional'.¹ Unfortunately, both their characterisation of their partners as regionalist, and their self characterisation were essentially wrong, proving that the anti-BJP plank cannot be the source of unity and coherence.

The differences within, and between the JD and the SP came up on the issue of portfolio allocation. The TMC was not happy with the performance of the DMK. The CPI and the CPM had been denouncing the Chidambaram's budget on the basis that it had followed the guidelines of Manmohanomics. Moreover, the UF constituents haggled even on issues, which have been

1. The CPM and CPI for instance are ideological parties with national aspirations. The Tamil Manila Congress and the Tiwari Congress have the same beliefs and programme as the Rao Congress. The only self-proclaimed regional parties are the DMK, TDP and AGP. All of them, however, have over the years tried to play on increasingly all-India role. They have sought to win the support not through appeals to local patriotism but to the short-term economic aspirations of the middle class, and the poor. Even Samajwadi Party, which tried to dominate U.P. and gained a foothold in Maharashtra essentially on the basis of casteism, has never claimed to be regionalist. JD was a jumble of local caste-based formations bound together by a confused, nostalgic Lohiaism.

decided in the CMP. Decisions on number of issues had to be differed only because they did not suit the political interests of some of the partners or the other. Thus, Mr. Gowda became a prisoner of both the Left ideologues and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, who stripped him of all moral ascendancy, and turned him into a figure of fun.¹ For instance, Mr. Ramkrishna Hegde, who was expelled from the JD for six years, had strongly criticised Mr. Gowda at a personal level, calling him opportunist and servile, unsophisticated and lacking a national perspective.² No wonder, Ms. Jyoti Basu, has also revealed that he had been advising the PM, not to worry about the government's durability, but to go ahead with the implementation of the CMP. His terse declaration that his party's refusal to let him accept the office of P.M. was a 'historical blunder.'³ For it clearly, implies that he would have managed the ruling Fronts' affairs more competently. More than this, the P.M. was alleged of not consulting the Steering Committee enough as the new culture of running the UF government. Mr. Indrajit Gupta, an astute parliamentarian and trusted Home Minister of UF pointed out that "Deve Gowda's basic weakness was his inability to devise norms and procedures for handling the functioning of a coalition. Very often when we should have met we were not able to meet either because of there being lack of time, mine or his, or may be because of styles of functioning. Style of functioning are very important. And then my background, my political background, my social background and everything is different to Deve Gowda's. You know from where he came and naturally you cannot expect that he and I

1. Kuldip Nayar : "Deve Gowda and UF Leadership", *Mainstream*, (May 3, 1997), pp. 11-12

2. *The Hindu*, 13 April, 1997

3. *The Times of India*, 17 May, 1996.

will be on the same wavelength.”¹ Above all, the UF was an extraordinary conglomeration of political personalities who had nothing in common—no shared memories, no shared collective association, no sense of joint struggle—except burning desire to share power. The fact is that the UF Steering Committee, during the last six months of its existence, became a super cabinet, and many of the coalition party leaders were trying to act as super P.M.s.

(d) Withdrawal of Support to the UF Government:

There were powerful factions within the Congress. The spectacle of disarray, and unseemly squabbles for power and position forced Mr. Narasimha Rao to quit as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP). The inner struggle was settled with the election of Mr. Kesri as the CPP leader. The Congress-I leaders—long used to the fruits of office and patronage—found it difficult to reconcile themselves to the new role as outside supporters. They expected that the UF partners would jettison a particular faction and hand over the government to them. This expectation was belied.² There was a clamour, among Congressmen, for joining the government in coalition with the UF. None of the UF parties had taken their desire seriously. The Congress-I, however, could not take a drastic move that would lead to fresh elections, as the party was ill-prepared for it. It had, thus, to reckon with two conflicting pressures—on the one hand it would like to get into power structure and on the other it

1. In an interview with *Home TV* telecast on April 12, 1997.

2. The parties such as the JD and the SP were willing to go along with the Congress, with no clash of political interests between them as the former had been reduced to a virtual non-entity in UP and Bihar. However, the regional and Left parties neither could have extend support to the Congress nor allowed it to be the coalition partner to avoid snap poll, as there would have been a day-to-day friction between them at the state level.

would be keen on averting a fresh poll.¹ Once the evil designs proved impossible, the Congress-I withdrew support to the Mr. Deve Gowda government with the excuse that Mr. Gowda was pursuing an agenda to "finish Congress" on 30th March, 1997 and also staked its claim to form its own government. It was observed by many that Kesari was man in a hurry to become P.M. and also was stung by a CBI team investigating him on allegedly disproportionate assets without any intimation to it. Hence he pulled rug under the feet of the UF.

After having met the President Mr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, and handed him a letter, Mr. Kesari explained his party's decision in terms of prevailing "secular logic", and noted that "the very basic of support of the Congress party to the UF government led by Mr. Gowda was to contain the communal forces, and consolidate secular forces". Further, he observed that it appears that the efforts of UF government were determined to marginalise the Congress, and to allow the urgent national issues to take back seat.² Apart from other things those around, Mr. Kesari sought to project himself as the head of a viable alternative.

On the other side, the UF constituents urged the Congress-I party leadership to reconsider its decision of withdrawing support, or be prepared to face elections. Pressure began to develop – increasing the distance between Mr. Gowda and Mr. Kesari. Despite, its lack of coherence, the UF was not maintained to provide solace to the Congress, as even Mr. Gowda was prepared to seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha.

1. K. Katyal: "An Uncertain Phase", *The Hindu*, January 7, 1997.

2. Harish Khare: "Congress move – a sheer opportunism", *The Hindu*, April 3, 1997.

Added together, these two developments confronted the President with two options – whether to invite Mr. Kesari to form the government based on its status as the second largest party, or to fix a date for the session of the Lok Sabha to enable the UF coalition government to test its strength. While the Congress-I did not have the arithmetic on its side to form the government, the President thought it proper to ask Mr. Gowda for vote of confidence.

On 11 April 1997, the UF under Mr. Gowda went down fighting, with 190 ayes against 338 noes in the vote of confidence. No principles, ideologies or welfare programmes for the people were involved on either side. It was a naked struggle for power, and self-survival on all sides. It was claimed by some, that those in power were selective in instituting police inquiries, CBI investigations, and court cases against their rivals, and were in fact, indulging in official blackmail which was sought to be met by counter blackmail of support withdrawal.

[VI] THE CHANGE OF GUARD – ENTERS MR. I.K. GUJRAL

At the very first meeting of the UF's Steering Committee, held the following morning, it was clear that Mr. Gowda was not willing to step down to make way for some other person in the Front as demanded by the Congress. The UF partners, who stood united and firmly, having become prey to the last minute machinations, of the Congress did not react favourably to Gowda's attitude. The leaders of some UF partners mooted proposals for rapprochement with the Congress, and made Mr. Gowda the sacrificial goat in bargaining for another lease of

life. The prospect of mid-term polls forced both the UF and the Congress-I to come to reapproachment.¹

The communists, whose initial dilemma was moral-commisars behaving like a yogi – (how to tell Mr. Gowda to resign when they themselves were instrumental in installing him), were the first to realise the prospect of the Front's break-up if they would persist with Mr. Deve Gowda. Along with the Congress' reluctant stance, the BJP leadership had announced the formation of the National Democratic Front. Regional parties, which had come together to stall the BJP and its communal politics, could now think of an alternative front, where the BJP would be one of the constituents. For the first time, BJP looked like changing its image.

This only confirmed the communists' fear. Now their stand was: the UF with Deve Gowda if possible; without him, if necessary. Deve Gowda, too resiled from his earlier position. He offered to step down, if the Front could find another acceptable person. He had the assurance that he would stay as the leader of the Front, but for the government purpose, someone else would be pressed into service.

On 19 April, 1997, the Left parties, who had the UF by the collar, managed to prevail on the UF partners in the election of a

1. 'The climate was such that the BJP would have reaped the maximum harvest. Its alliance with the BSP in U.P., the Akalis in Punjab, the Samta in Bihar and Bansi Lal in Haryana could have been formidable at that juncture. States like M.P. and H.P., where Congress governments were in saddle, were also the states where the BJP would have been its direct contestant. With the battered image that the Congress had after the debate in the Lok Sabha, it was well-nigh impossible for the party to return. The UF constituents were justifiably worried. They did not want to face a mid-term poll at a time when in comparison to the BJP, they looked less cohesive and less acceptable. They wanted some time to elapse between then and time of polls so that the impression the BJP had spread of providing a stable alternative would have lessened.' Op. cit. Kuldip Nayar: "Deve Gowda and UF leadership", *Mainstream*, May 3, 1997.

'consensus' candidate for the post of P.M.¹ The endorsement of Mr. Indra Kumar Gujral's candidature by the Front's Steering Committee set the stage for the formation of a new UF government, ending 22 days of uncertainty. In the over crowded race for power. Mr. Gujral emerged the winner as the agreed nominee of the Left parties as also the JD and TDP². Congress President Mr. Kesari found a friendly P.M. to ensure atleast that the government did not use the coercive instruments such as the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate to harras Congress leaders.

(a) Functioning of the UF Government : Challenges of Consensus:

Mr. Gujral retained Mr. Gowda's team, except for the TMC ministers and onc Yadav causality, as he was sworn in on April 21, 1997. The new UF government won the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on April 22. The TMC rejoined the coalition after first deciding to support it from outside. The UF cabinet was supplemented by a Core Committee. The UF and Congress-I

1. CPI(M) General Secretary H.S. Surjeet successfully blocked the names of candidates whom the Left did not like to see as the P.M., such as Bihar C.M. Laloo Yadav's on the ground of corruption charges, S.P. Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav's due to then recent embitterment of relations between both, and G.K. Moopnar's due to his proximity to Sonia Gandhi and the Congress. In fact, TMC president, a front runner, lost the race in the final round, and he was taken for the ride, not only by his ally, DMK, but also by other partners of the Front. Neither the TDP nor the DMK came to propose his name. TDP's Chandrababu Naidu, who assumed the role of the king maker in the crisis, was privately favouring the name of the External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral, although publicly he maintained the air of neutrality.

2. According to the *Business line* editorial - "The UF chose Mr. Gujral not by consensus but as a compromise- hammered out so violently that one of the constituents (TMC) initially broke away from the whole... While there can be no doubt that among the front runner for the UF leadership Mr. Gujral was the best choice, it was indeed a sorry spectacle to watch the antics of the bunch of politicians without the nerve to go back to the people. By narrowing in on Mr. Gujral notwithstanding the hectic parleys and manoeuvring behind the scene, both by those unabashedly pitching for the *kursi* and those pushed towards it, the Front could have done worse. The most important plus point in Mr. Gujral favour is that in an era when corruption and politicians have become synonymous, the affable and astute external affairs minister in the Deve Gowda dispensation has managed to keep his name clean of scams and scandals". *Business line*, 25 April, 1997, p. 17.

jointly floated a 10 member parliamentary co-ordination committee to ensure a better interaction between the two political group in the running of the government. Mr. Kesari built a good rapport with the affable UF P.M. Gujral.

If Deve Gowda lived on borrowed time, Mr. Gujral ruled over a government nobbled by a lack of parliamentary consensus. The Lok Sabha that he had been asked to head kept three quarters of its members out of the government. The remaining member who represented the parties in government were as querulous as alley cats, supported from outside by a party which, though badly mauled in election, had recurrent bouts of dreams that it will return from the doghouse, and whenever it felt such Olympian yearning, it itched to withdraw support. All this made the pyramid of power more unsteady than ever. Mr. Gujral faced the tricky task of keeping the combine intact and Congress happy.

Within months, Mr. Kesari started imposing conditions, backing them with threats to bring down the government on a variety of grounds: that government must respect the Congress-I more and consult it more often; that a "mechanism" must be set up for close-coordination and so on. On the other hand, trouble was brewing in the UF¹. Mr. Laloo Yadav was constrained to leave the JD. The formation of Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar strengthened those within the Congress who wanted a recasting of the political equation in North India, and also a Congress-friendly role envisaged for Mr. Mulayam Singh in such a recasting equation. The differences between the DMK and TMC had surfaced with the misunderstanding that former opposed to make Mr. Moopnar as the leader of the UF after

1. Nikhil Chakravarty: "Gujral's Voyage of Discovery with Laloo and the Left", *Mainstream*, May 9, 1997, p. 4.

Gowda. Indeed with or without prompting from Kesari, the UF crowd had a tough time appreciating one another. For instance, in July 1997, the DMK threatened to pull out of the Mr. Gujral government because Mr. Karunanidhi suspected some of the UF leaders of working on a "personal Common Minimum Programme". A couple of month later, the Agriculture Minister Mr. Chaturanan Mishra publicly engaged the Finance Minister in a dispute that had less to do with differences over policy, and more to do with the CPI leader's lack of familiarity with the by-laws of decision making in a Cabinet System¹.

In the Gujral regime, the Steering Committee behaved as it were a supreme commander, and the P.M. had to merely endorse its decisions. The Steering Committee had not allowed a decision on the issue of hikes in petro-products prices to fill the growing deficit in the oil-pool, though the deficit was likely to have a disastrous impact on the economy in the long run. The Steering Committee seemed to be a collective group that wanted to prevent decisions rather than take them. Possibly because each one of them was aware that the coalition was so fragile that any decision, right or wrong, would have led to its collapse. For all his political insights, and intellect, P.M., Mr. Gujral, steeped in Nehruvian principles, found himself in a tight position, as far as taking any decisions on his own was concerned. He, in turn, was

1. Mishra also took on Gujral by saying, "I'm not his employee, I'm his colleague". His outburst can be seen in the background of the Left parties, discomfiture with the Finance Minister's policies towards agriculture, public sector, insurance and public distribution system among other thing. Inherent conflicts in the UF made Gujral a helpless onlooker rather than a prime mover. The episode of imposition of emergency in U.P. was a blatant example of disunity. After a marathon meeting the Union Cabinet first recommended President Rule and backtracked when the President sent it back for reconsideration. The cabinet as well as the P.M. came in for much criticism for the manner in which U.P. issue was handled. The differences that existed between the Defence Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Home Minister, Inderjit Gupta and others came to fore." Kalyani Shankar: "UF Coalition: Peeling Plaster", *The Hindustan Times*, November 2, 1997, p.12.

governed by the Steering Committee. The Prime Minister's Office had never been rendered authorityless as it had been then.¹ Mr. Gujral remained a leader by default, chosen by a cabal dominated by mercurial regional satraps.

(b) Gujral's Resignation:

In a virtual charge-sheet against the UF, the CWC (supporting the party) accused the UF of "non-governance and inability to discharge its responsibility of governing the country." Member after member criticised it for failure to take the economic and political decisions reducing "the Indian State to a rudderless ship." Then came the Interim Report of the Jain Commission which allegedly indicted DMK in Mr. Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

The DMK's association with the LTTE killers of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was not accepted to the Congress-I, and CPP (Congress Parliamentary Party) executive passed a resolution, demanding the expulsion of the DMK ministers from the Union Cabinet. The UF, however, refused to sacrifice the DMK. Consequently, the Congress-I pushed the country to another precipice in just 8 months by announcing the withdrawal of support to the Gujral's government. The P.M. Mr. Gujral chose to resign instead of seeking vote of confidence as was done by Mr. Gowda. The experiment of coalition government of the UF, thus, came to an end in 18 months.

The withdrawal of support to the Mr. Gujral's government was attributed more to the internal struggle within the Congress

1. Vijay Sanghvi: "Disastrous Steering", *The Hindustan Times*, (Sunday Magazine), July 27, 1997, p.5. "The cracks are getting more and more visible in the cabinet meetings", said a senior government official pointing out that even during Gowda's regime it was not so clear.

party then anything else. The UF government collapsed at the alter of personal ambitions, and egos of the leaders of the Congress-I. The reckless action of Mr. Sitram Kesari, and later some of the leaders like Mr. Arjun Singh, in withdrawing support to to the UF not just wrecked the UF government but also finished for all practical purposes, the first genuine coalition of the national and regional parties in independent India. The uneasy equation among the top leaders prevented the party from taking a politically sound approach to the revelations of the Jain Commission.

(c) Aftermath:

The Congress-I's adventurist gamble back-fired with its own MPs having visibly become nervous at the prospects of facing another general elections. Hence, the Congress-I staked a claim to form a government after Mr. Gujral's resignation. But the most UF constituents, with the unsavoury experience with the Congress did not take its bait. As the crisis dragged on, the Congress desperately sought a way out of the impasse of its own creation. It made pre-posterious proposals. One was that the DMK ministers should stand down for a month during which period ways would be found to 'exonerate' their party. The other was that the Mr. Gujral should head a cabinet of four from which not just DMK but also several other groups might be excluded. The UF turned down both these proposals. The ultimate shame on the Congress, however, was that a fairly sizeable number of party faithfuls including some veteran leaders were ready to walkover to the BJP. Mr. Advani claim of the number of potential defectors having risen to 40 and the assertion of a large number of Congressmen that about 40 of their colleagues were, indeed,

to jump onto the BJP bandwagon made the countrymen believe that Congressmen were capable of worst betrayal. After all, 22 of the 37 Congress MLAs in U.P. did that under nauseating circumstances.

If the Congress problem was to break-out of its political helplessness, the BJP's dilemma was to overcome its political untouchability. The BJP leaders felt that the sudden eruption of crisis between the UF and the Congress-I had given them a golden opportunity to capture power at the Centre. After the developments in U.P., where the BJP was able to break and split not only the Congress Legislative Party, but also the JD, the leaders were emboldened to cause a similar coup in New Delhi. The BJP's desperation to carry out that was so great that the senior party leaders risked their personal reputation to virtually encourage defection from the Congress. It had, however, abandoned its ambition to form a government because the Congress MPs anxious to cross over to the BJP were only 40, and thus, seven short of the mandatory number required by the Anti-Defection Law. The BJP, once held up as an example of discipline, cohesion and probity had, thus, discredited itself through its trial to form the government by dubious means. It had, thus, become clear after the resignation of the Mr. Gujral government that, either of the Congress-I, the BJP and the UF was not in a position to form government on its own. The realignment of political parties was impossible. Hence, the President K.R. Narayan dissolved Lok Sabha and ordered for fresh elections.

(C)
**TRAVEL BEYOND IN QUEST FOR POLITICAL
STABILITY AT THE CENTRE: 1998 ONWARDS**

(VII) THE BANDWAGON COALITION-BJP STYLE

(a) Short Cuts to Power – From Lucknow to Delhi:

The political action in U.P. in October 1997¹ was a defining moment in the evolution of the BJP's politics. It reflected the party's growing awareness, that it could not win power on its own strength in the states, and even more clearly, at the Centre. In 1996, the bid to form a Vajpayee – led government by accepting anyone's support was part of a concerted effort to break the barrier of unacceptability. The shift suggested the BJP's readiness to compromise the principles which it pretended to be the very embodiment of, and to look for shortcuts to power. The party-in-waiting could not wait endlessly, while keeping its power-seeking legislators in a permanent state of expectancy.

From then onwards, the focus was on winning power not through political mobilisation, but through instant alliances and electoral adjustments. In particular the BJP realised, that it had to make itself more acceptable to regional parties beyond the Hindi belt. As a result, it sought to distance itself from the North India thrust, for example, by giving up its insistence on Hindi as the national language, and by emphasising states, and restructuring Centre-state relations. This tactic probably also stemmed from the lesson that the BJP had learnt in 1996, when

1. The BJP seized power in Lucknow by breaking the BSP and the Congress, reported by offering breakaway groups portfolios and large amounts of money. The new Chief Minister, Kalyan Singh, even gave cabinet positions to allegedly corrupt and criminal elements and in the process formed the jumbo cabinet of 91 ministers. Subsequently, the BJP's list for the legislative Council also included known criminals. At the state-level this 'horse-trading' and promise of ministerships were justified in the name of *apadharma*, the Brahmin's dharma of survival. In other words, end justifies the means. Its success in U.P. sufficiently enthused the party to incorporate these rule-breaking and rule-bending tactics as a routine aspect of politics.

it had underrated the importance of the regional phenomena, and misjudged the priorities of regional parties, who are socially rooted in their regions, and have their own regional agendas which run contrary to that of the BJP.

Its most significant achievement was its alliance with the AIADMK, which gave the party a foothold in Tamil Nadu. It gradually succeeded in forging alliances with a dozen parties, most of which were factions and breakaway groups, such as Mr. Navin Patnaik's Biju Janta Dal in Orissa, Ms. Mamta Banerjee's Trinmool Congress in West Bengal, Mr. Naresh Agarwal's Loktantrik Congress in U.P., Mrs. Lakshmi Parvati's splinter of the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh (an alliance which did not last for a long time) Mr. Bhigu Phukan's breakaway faction of the Asom Gana Parishad and Mr. Ramkrishna Hegde's Lokshakti in Karnataka. In contrast when the BJP failed to prove its majority in 1996, it had three allies - the Samata Party, the Shiv Sena and the Haryana Vikas Party. The logic of these alliance was dictated by expediency, and there was little by way of ideological justification. As the leader of AIADMK, Ms. Jayalalita put it, the alliance was only for seat sharing and had nothing to do with ideology. These deals and alliances beginning with Mr. Kalyan Singh's decimation of the Congress in U.P., undeniably helped the BJP gain national spread, overcome its isolation and establish symbolically a pan-Indian presence.¹

(b) A Shift in Tactics, Not in Strategy:

Most political parties, when they are about to capture power or when they control the reins of government, tend to

1. The geographical spread is matched partially by an expansion of its social base. Though the BJP marshalling a respectable chunk of OBC vote in U.P. and Orissa, and tribal support in M.P. and Gujrat. However the extension of its social constituency is partly neutralised by the flow of persons from other parties.

adopt moderate policies on critical issues. That the BJP is quite capable on altering its strategy, is evident after 1992, when it shifted from the ethno-religious mobilisation towards a more pragmatic policy. But it is also noteworthy, that the shift took place after the party had reaped tremendous political capital from the Ayodhya strategy. And even as it moderates its public stance by toning down the anti-Muslim attitude, the competing pressure to sustain its commitment to Hindutva is unmistakable.

This becomes apparent when we shift the focus from the formal pronouncements, and public speeches in New Delhi designed for the middle-class, and English-language media in metropolitan centres, to the extremist rhetoric in the 1998 election campaign at the state and constituency-level, or the actions of a BJP government when it occupies office at the state-level. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena-BJP government abolished the Minorities Commission, tried its best to sabotage the Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry into the Bombay riots, cut the grant-in-aid to the Urdu Academy, displaced Muslims in the name of slum clearance, and denied them rehabilitation, and withdrew criminal cases related to the riots against Mr. Bal Thackeray, and Mr. Sarpotdar, another Shiv Sena leader. Similarly, the Kalyan Singh government, while making Sanskrit compulsory from Class III, ignored the claims of Urdu in U.P.

Shifting its ideological stance is central to the BJP's strategy. On the crucial temple-mosque controversy, the party's double speak was most apparent in 1997. At a BJP-sponsored Muslim youth conference, Mr. L.K. Advani assured the Muslims, that they had nothing to fear, but he made a point of mentioning all the issues that had alienated the party from the Muslims community, thus emphasising that the party was not diluting its

core concerns. He promised the audience, 'If the country's Muslims could give up [their] claim to Ayodhya, I will personally speak to the VHP, and work out an amicable claim to the Mathura and Kashi issues.'¹ But as the 1998 election campaign picked up, at no point did Mr. Kalyan Singh downplay the Ram Temple issue. By contrast, the BJP showed considerable flexibility in making adjustments on three policy planks of *Suchita*, *Suraksha* and *Swadeshi* (probity in public life, national security and self reliance). The party's campaign against corruption and criminalisation, for instance, lost its relevance. In fact, its leaders asked the Election Commission to refrain from its insistence that candidates with criminal cases be debarred from contesting elections and that, this decision be left to parties.

(c) The 1998 Elections and Formation of BJP-led Coalition Government :

For those who believed, or just hoped, that the past decade of hung parliaments, and coalition politics was merely a transitory phenomenon, 12th Lok Sabha Elections in Feb 1998 were a major disappointment. The election results confirmed the overall tendency towards regionalisation of Indian politics and protracted construction of Mr. A. B. Vajpayee's 13-party coalition government in late March 1998, demonstrated the Indian Prime Ministers would henceforth be made and unmade in state capitals rather than in Delhi. Probably the most remarkable thing about this second round of general elections in 18 months, was how little it changed the overall balance of power between the main forces of Indian politics. On their own, the two main parties either maintained their share of seats, as did the Congress, in spite of a reduced share of the overall vote, or won

1. *Outlook*, 7 December 1997.

moderately, as the BJP did.¹ The major novelty of the 1998 election was undoubtedly that most political parties recognised the importance of electoral alliances, and that these pragmatic alliances, subsequently strengthened a range of regional political formations.

Even though the BJP-led alliance represented 255 seats (out of the declared 534 seats) in the Lok Sabha, while a majority requires 272, the President asked Mr. Vajpayee to form the government in mid-March since he had been elected leader of the largest party in the Assembly. For the first time the BJP was in a pivotal position, at the centre of a large coalition of 18 parties. After winning the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha, the BJP entered the hitherto most precarious exercise ever in management of extremely diverse political interests – many of them resolutely parochial – in the history of Independent India.² In view of majoritarian legacies of Indian politics, the party also entered a terrain of compromises and potential disorder which

1. First of all, it was not an overall phenomenon since the party lost in most of the states where it was in power for some time, alone or in coalition – Rajasthan, Haryana and Maharashtra. Secondly, in terms of seats, its tally now reached 178, as against 161 in 1996, while its share of valid votes registered a more significant increase, from 20.7% to about 25.5%, on the same footing as the Congress. Interestingly, the BJP did not make such progress in its northern and western strongholds where it more or less reached its saturation point. The BJP's gain came mainly from East and South India, where it used to be almost non-existent, possible only because of its new alliances with the regional parties here which did surprisingly well by cashing on the anti-incumbency reflex, and herein lies the main explanation for its progress, and more importantly, for its capacity to form the government.

2. Large number of BJP supporters, especially those among the urban middle classes, nurtured the hope that it would distinguish itself in at least in four respects, despite the limitations of coalition politics. First, Vajpayee would give a sense of purpose and direction to governance; at minimum, his BJP component would function with cohesion and unity. Second, it would control or mitigate lawlessness and disorder; to the extent the BJP is a "disciplined" party, it would be well placed to do so. Third, it would demonstrate its ability to do without the network of patronage, coteries, and institutionalised corruption associated with the Congress(I). And, fourth, it would impart dynamism to the economy after it barely escaped contracting the Asian flu, op. cit., Praful Bidwai, "The End of Myth," *Frontline* (April 9, 1999), p. 121.

many of its voters resent, and which furthermore is anathema to the ideological 'purists' of the RSS and the VHP. But as BJP's complex web of electoral alliances testify to, this was a calculated risk which the BJP leadership seemed willing to take because the costs of continued 'majestic isolation', as Mr. Advani termed the party's situation prior to the elections, were potentially higher.

The BJP seemed to have quickly learned the art forming coalitions. Soon after the nomination of Mr. Vajpayee as PM, the party evolved with its partners a common 'national agenda', a sort of minimal programme for the new government. On this new platform, it gave up the most controversial articles of its election manifesto: the building of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the abrogation of Article 370 and the imposition of an uniform civil code. Instead, the 'national agenda' eulogised 'genuine secularism', an echo of Mr. Vajpayee's 'positive secularism' in the early 1980s. Similarly, the BJP accepted significant under-representation in the new government: while it accounted for 70% of the coalition in the Lok Sabha, it had only 56% of the members forming the government. Four AIADMK MPs, 2 Samta Party leaders and one from almost each of the other components of its coalition belonged to its government.

The BJP seemed to have also become adapt in coalition-making, in terms of bargaining and obtaining support, whatever symbolic cost could be. To gain the 20 seats or so, the pre-election coalition needed to reach the magic figure of 272, it did not hesitate to offer a cabinet portfolio to Mr. Buta Singh, a former minister of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who stood as an independent. Most of the Congress leaders who deserted their party in late 1997 thinking it was sinking, before Mrs. Sonia Gandhi entered the political arena were welcomed. Mr. P.K. Kumarmangalam, for instance, was given the Ministry of Power. The BJP also showed its command of making coalition in

accepting a new ally in Haryana, while the HVP was its traditional partner in the state, it accepted the support of latter's arch enemy, Mr. Devi Lal's Haryana Lok Dal, which had won more (4) seats in the elections. More importantly, Mr. Vajpayee received the support of Mr. Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and Mr. Farooq Abdullah's National Conference in Parliament during the first vote of confidence.

(d) Operation of the BJP-led Coalition Government:

From the beginning, it was felt that the BJP cannot rule a coalition in the same way as the Congress. Firstly, the BJP needed more supporters since it needed to recruit about 100 MPs from other parties. It did create a strong dependence *vis-à-vis* regional forces. Secondly, the BJP could not have shown as much flexibility as the Congress because of the normalisation of the BJP, its 'mainstreamisation' implies 'a Congressisation', which, in its view means factional fights between power-hungry leaders, corruption, and criminalisation of the party code. RSS leaders had already shown concern regarding the induction of ex-Congressmen without any ideological affinities the personalisation of power through the projection of Mr. Vajpayee whom many RSS men consider as too moderate—as the BJP's main card during the election campaign, and more importantly, the dilution of the party's programme.¹

The BJP was trapped in a precarious situation. On the one hand, it depended on the several allies, whose support being conditional on questioning the fundamentals of the Hindutva

1. K. Sudarshan, the RSS ideologue, warned in *Panchjanya* that any compromise on core issues, those pertaining to the Hindutva ideology, would endanger the very existence of the BJP. *Outlook*, (16 February 1998), p.24. The appointment of Suraj Bhan, Bhai Mahavir, and S.S. Bhandari, among others, illustrated this point as early as April 1998. This recalls the RSS support tending towards the Congress during the 1984 elections. Vajpayee was then at the helm.

doctrine. On the other hand, going too far away from the Hindutva doctrine will weaken the traditional relationship between the party and the mother organisation. The BJP-led alliance had a paper-thin majority. Every partner in that alliance made it clear that it was with the BJP because the party has accepted its agenda. They have not accepted the BJP agenda. The growing acolytes fervently hoped that the government will stay despite inherent contradictions. Insiders admitting to the last election being a "semi-final" and thought the "final" will give them a comfortable majority.

However, The BJP's governance of the national polity ran into difficulties in the number game, created both by its partners with sizeable members, and the Opposition led by the Congress and the Left. While matters of national security, such as the nuclear tests at Pokharan in May helped the new government to cash in on nationalistic feelings and solidify the ruling coalition, but in the economic domain where the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, liberalised the import of consumer goods in April 1998, and in the promotion of Hindutva, the government did not comply with the RSS doctrine¹. Mr. Vajpayee realised to his chagrin that running a coalition government of unruly, and discordant partners was a ball game altogether, different from his role as BJP-crowd puller. Since the formation of the BJP-coalition in March 1998, the AIADMK *Supremo* Ms. Jayalalita remained a constant headache for him. Her one point was the

1 "The achievements of the BJP led government at the Centre in its first hundred days are extremely limited. Apart from conducting the Pokharan test and thereby exercising the nuclear option, a commitment made in the coalition's National Agenda for Governance, it has little to show in terms of strides taken towards transforming *swaraj* (self- rule) to *surajya* (good governance)." L.K.Advani, the Union Home Minister candid admission in an interview to *Home TV* on 26th June, 1998.

ouster of the DMK government.¹ A tall order which the P.M. found difficult to carry out in the absence of any substantive probe of a break-down of law and order in Tamil Nadu. Along with, the Samata also increasingly got restive at the BJP's scruples over Article 356, as it believed that the conditions were appropriate for the dismissal of the state government in Bihar, run in all but name by Mr. Laloo Yadav. Ms. Mamta's Trinamul Congress also demanded on similar lines in West Bengal. Mr. Vajpayee was perforced to adopt a cautious approach that hampered his style of functioning. Keeping his his unpredictable partners in good humour and at times pander to their wishes, thus earned legitimate criticism from the Opposition (as on question of sending Central teams to states like West Bengal).

The BJP-led government at the Centre failed to do anything to forfeit the goodwill that accompanied it at the popular level when it assumed office. From the manner in which it handled the soaring prices of the essential commodities, especially, to the sudden change of the leadership of the Delhi government as a sop to the Khurana faction of the State BJP (that made it a laughing stock before the public at large). The BJP testified that art of governance is beyond it reach, some thing its critic have all along maintained. In fact the BJP and Sangh Parivar pre poll propaganda that they were capable of providing a "stable government with an able Prime minister" shattered.

The forced resignation of Shri Sahib Singh Verma as the Delhi C.M., being replaced by then Information & Broadcasting minister Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, in a sudden and hectic decision of

1. Later, she also demanded increase in the number of ministers from her party in the Union Cabinet and divesting V. Ramamuthy (of the Tamil Rajiv Congress) of the Petroleum portfolio in favour of one of her trusted lieutenants.

the central leadership misfired, left both upset. What the leadership did not realise was that apart from the legality of such a step taken after elections to Delhi had been announced – being questioned, it was an utterly improper move bringing into sharp focus before the electorate the organisation's confession of maladministration in the Capital. Apart from the general discontentment, Jat antagonism (heightened by Sahib Singh's unceremonious exit), spelled BJP's defeat by the Congress.

The mishandling of the Bihar situation by the BJP and Samata Party snowballed into a major crisis for the government. After its attempt at the imposition of Article 356 in Bihar was sent back by the President for reconsideration, there were attempts to denigrate the Presidency by various means (including the unprecedented step of leaking out to sections of the press so called details of private conversations between the President and Ministers). This revealed a sense of desperation by those in power once both their inefficiency and ulterior motives came out in the open.¹ And their utter incapacity to govern was exposed best by the final outcome of the Bezbaruah episode.²

Notwithstanding the finance Minister's tall claims and assurances, the economy was in doldrums. His performance in handling the petroleum and urea price hikes only caused acute embarrassment to the government. And the Swadesi Jagaran Manch's sharp criticism of the present economic course highlighted the BJP's dilemma on this score, underlined as it is by the *swadeshi-videshi* controversy.

1. Venkitesh Ramakrishnan : "A Dismissal Backfires", *Frontline*, (March 12, 1999), pp.16-22.

2. The Supreme Court forced the BJP-led Government to revoke its transfer of M.K. Bezbaruah, Director of the Enforcement Directorate, and administered it a rap on the knuckles for misrepresenting facts in an affidavit. For details see, *Frontline*, (October 9, 1998), pp. 4-14.

The Union Cabinet was so deeply divided even on basic issues of national security, and economic policy that it dared not discuss them – as happened with the nuclear tests, telecommunications and culture. Mr. Vajpayee might have made all the conciliatory noises he wanted on Indo-Pakistan relation, and the religious minorities. But his own bosses and colleagues in the Parivar ensured that they did not amount to much. Within weeks of the Lahore bus-trip, Mr. Advani made his inglorious “Akand Bharat” speech at the Wagh border. And the RSS Pratinidhi Sabha in Lucknow decided to “revive the Hindu agenda” aggressively, threatening even to “forbid” Hindus from attending institutions run by the minorities, and Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, than the Sangh’s Number Three, went as far as to allege that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s “sudden entry” into active politics a year ago was guided by “certain foreign powers which did not want India to emerge as a strong nation”. The paranoia, and the message of defiance of any “soft” line, could not have been clearer.

Thus government deviously manipulated, and undermined India’s democratic institutions. It stooped to the lowest possible level in rigging and arbitrarily transferring litigation pertaining to Ms. Jayalalita away from the special judges. It handled Doordarshan and All India Radio especially crudely, and also hacked away at what little integrity there was left in some of India’s topmost social science institutions, packing the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) with Hindutva supporters of dubious academic competence.

As far dependence on cabals, coteries and patronage networks, this government reached new lows. Most of its senior ministers had their own close coteries, starting from the Mr.

Vajpayee's Pramod Mahajan-Jaswant Singh group, ably backed by his foster-daughter's husband, assorted bureaucrats, and media-spin doctors such as Sudheendra Kulkarni. The Advani faction had its own operators from Mr. K.N. Govindacharya and Mr. S. Gurumurthy to Mr. Mohan Guruswamy all the way down to senior and middle-level journalists. The government did not take a single major economic decision without the involvement of some business group or the other.

As for corruption, the Government was hard put to answer the serious charges levelled by Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat¹ and by Mohan Guruswamy, whatever the latter's motive and his own business links. The stakes—whether in permitting global depository receipts, writing-off bad bank debts (Rs. 2,800 crores in 1998 alone), allowing telecom fee defaults, or forcing public sector oil firms into joint ventures with private groups who milk them—were so high that even a fraction of one percent translates into scores of crores. And we may be talking about 10 percent-plus.

The Government made a horrible mess of economy, returning it to its pitiable state in 1991 by its own Finance Minister's admission. It did stand accused of profligacy and an anti-poor orientation. The Centre's revenue deficit reached a record high of 3.4%. So utterly parasitical was the Government that it had to borrow Rs. 314 crores a day just to stay alive. All the macro economic indicators went haywire. The central plan outlay fell short of the target by 16% and there was little productive happening in the economy. The Government botched up social sector schemes, including the JRY and reduced real allocation to health. The poor also had to bear the burden of additional indirect taxation, inflation and low-growth, coupled

1. *India Today*, January 11, 1999, pp. 14-20.

with rising unemployment. Other measures, such as 30 to 40% increases in issue prices under the public distribution system, and hiking of postal rates and rail fares, adversely affected the vast majority, further widening income disparities.

The Government's balance sheet, then was largely negative. The person singularly responsible for this is none other than Mr. Vajpayee. It was because of him there was no cohesion in the Cabinet. It is he who cut of his paranoia decided not to take into confidence the Home, and Defence Ministers over Pokharan-II. It is he who played ducks and drakes with economic decision-making. It is he who called for a "debate" on conversions at the height of harassment of Christians, thus encouraging the forces who burned alive Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons. The less said about Gujarat-where Christians were systematically brutalised in over a hundred incidents, and where Hindutva mobs fused into gangsters-the better.¹ What happened to cartoonist Irfan Hussain marked an altogether new turn. There are too many similarities with patterns of eliminating media critics seen under Right-wing regimes, say in Latin America for people to be sanguine about this terrible episode.

It would simply not do for Mr. Vajpayee's apologists to take any of the following three lines of defence, denial or diversion-namely, that he was helpless in the face of the Sangh Parivar; the some of bad decisions of his cabinet were due to individual ministers' failings, and his Government had to reverse some of its decision because the Opposition was not co-operative enough, as most embarrassingly, on Bihar. Mr. Vajpayee is a part of the Sangh Parivar. Whether it lets him function freely is a matter internal to it; not concerning the larger public. After all, the public did not vote for the RSS. Mr. Vajpayee cannot both declare that "the Sangh is my soul", and then whine about the

1. *India Today*, January 11, 1999, pp. 22-27.

Sangh's high-handedness. If he could not dispense with the Sangh's cadres at election time, it was only natural that the *pracharaks* did demand their pound of flesh.

Mr. Vajpayee should have known that the failings of individual ministers, for example, Sushri Uma Bharati or Mr. Jagmohan, are secondary to the overarching principle of collective responsibility of the Cabinet under the West-minister system. In the final analysis the Cabinet, specifically the Prime Minister is responsible for what his/her government does. It is childish to blame any particular Minister for the Bihar fiasco or the mess over telecom rates. It is equally futile to blame the Opposition for doing what it is meant to do namely, oppose the Government. It is its legitimate function to do so, albeit responsibly, seriously. The BJP must have been not of its mind to put all its eggs in the Congress-I basket and count on its biggest political rival to oblige it on Bihar. This speaks of political immaturity, even stupidity.

"Rollback regime" describes the kindest view one can take of the Government's proclivity to undo what it itself set out to do in one-step-forward-two-steps back manoeuvres. A more realistic view is that it was a regime suffused with cynicism and skull-drudgery, which totally failed to do anything meaningful as far as the popular interest goes.¹ It not only allowed self-serving politicians to feather their nests, but injected new kinds of venality into Indian politics.

1. "The BJP, which emerged as a 'party with a differences' in this phase became a party' with differences', especially in its attempts to deviate from RSS and VHP on the one hand and its strategy to contain Samata, Mamata and Jayalalita on the other. Advani's advocacy, regarding the transformation of the party in a 'New BJP' which would be guided not by the issues of yesterday but by the agenda of tomorrow remained an empty rhetoric." op. cit. Sunil Kumar Choudhary : "BJP: From Opposition to Governance", *Politics India* (December, 1998) pp. 16-19.

(e) The Collapse:

The Vajpayee regime continued to totter in power even after the first anniversary, because of a stalemate. The BJP allies were unwilling to desert the floundering coalition only because they were not sure the Congress-I would include them in an alternative alliance. The Congress-I for its part, was unsure of winning an early mid-term election. It remained extremely weak in U.P., Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, so it did not seem to be in a hurry to pull down the Vajpayee coalition.

But this uneasy and transient situation did not last. Once again, crises emerged in the BJP-led coalition when Mr. P.R. Kumarmangalam remarked against Ms. Jayalalita on the Vishnu Bhagwat issue, in an interview to the T.V. Reacting to his views, the AIADMK sought a clarification from Mr. Vajpayee and asked him to clarify whether he agrees with the statement that "the AIADMK should leave the government." "If so, he need only tell us and in an hour we will be at Rashtrapati Bhavan informing the President that we are no longer supporting a government that does not want us to say in it." Later, Mr. Vajpayee disowned the criticism of his cabinet colleague, replying that these were his personal views, even as AIADMK threatened to withdraw support. Following the outright refusal of Ms. Jayalalita's three demands by the Union Cabinet, the AIADMK decided to pullout its ministers from the Centre, and later withdrew from the Co-ordination Committee of the BJP-led coalition.¹ At this time of political drama, Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani had sought the support of the AIADMK's arch enemy, the DMK, to save the Government. With this new political realignment policy of the BJP, the withdrawal of support by AIADMK was "inevitable." As expected, Ms. Jayalalita along with other AIADMK leaders met the President on April 14, 1999, and handed over letter

withdrawing support from the Government. With Ms. Jayalilita's move activating the opposition camp, the operation to vote out the BJP-led coalition was in full swing. Meanwhile, the President asked Mr. Vajpayee to seek a vote of confidence from the Lok Sabha. After hectic political drama, the motion of confidence in his government moved by Mr. Vajpayee on April 15, 1999 was rejected by the Lok Sabha by the narrowest of margins— of one vote—the tally being 269 in favour and 270 against the motion. Thus, the 13-month-old BJP-led coalition government at the Centre collapsed, paving the way for the formation of an alternative government, by non-BJP opposition parties. However, the anti-BJP parties, merely demonstrated a capacity to combine to oust the BJP from power, at the same time, they explicitly dramatised their incapacity to combine even to form an alternative government despite having nine agonising days at their disposal.¹ After the Congress and other anti-BJP parties, amid intense bickering failed to provide an alternative to the BJP-led coalition government, the 12th Lok Sabha was dissolved by the President on April 26, 1999, following the recommendation of the Union Cabinet. However, the President allowed the Vajpayee government to function as a caretaker government.

(VIII) FIVE MONTH'S INTERREGNUM OF THE CARETAKER REGIME

Shortly after Mr. Vajpayee lost the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha, the Cabinet Secretary sent a circular to all department of the Union Government, counselling restraint in matters involving financial commitments, and administrative implications over a long-term. In the following weeks, it became clear that elections would not be held until after the monsoon, which suggested a prolonged tenure for Mr. Vajpayee as

1. *Frontline*, April 23, 1999, pp. 18–24.

caretaker P.M.¹ The earlier circular was then modified, permitting the Union Government to exercise the power to implement decisions that did not “brook delay”. The first circular followed a convention that has gained acceptance since “caretaker” governance became an unavoidable reality two decades ago.² The second, in permitting a degree of flexibility in the norms of acceptable behaviour by a caretaker administration, was rather more unusual.

In this context, the BJP showed constitutional inventiveness in proposing an “*activist* caretaker government”, and then tempting business with “second generation reforms”. As the events since May showed, it opened up space for manoeuvre that Mr. Vajpayee’s caretaker government had been intent on utilising to full advantage, and with the norms of accountability being rather infirm in their foundation. Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, BJP general secretary’s defence that, “These guidelines (circular) should, however, not come in way of urgent issues, which cannot wait, being dealt with appropriately, if necessary, by obtaining the orders of minister in charge or the cabinet, depending on the nature of the case and degree of urgency ...The model code of conduct finalised by the Election Commission becomes operative only from the time election scheduled is announced by the Commission and in no case prior to that”³, does not legitimise the rather cavalier attitude of the caretaker government towards

1. The Constitution recognises no such entity as a caretaker administration but then neither does it conceive a situation in which a government is unencumbered by parliamentary accountability for an extended length of time. Sudden and unpredictable departures from a settled itinerary for the conduct of elections were obviously not considered the kind of eventuality for which detailed norms were to be inscribed into the Constitution.

2. The first caretaker government in independent India was headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who in December 1970 cut short the tenure of the then Lok Sabha, by recommending its dissolution and declaring elections, in which she returned to power with thumping majority.

3. See his interview, *Outlook*, 7, July 1999; p.p. 24–25.

the canons of parliamentarianism, and substandard governance, if not abysmal.

For the BJP-led caretaker coalition, a political formation given to invoking "nationalistic" rhetoric, even in times of peace, the war-like situation in Kargil provided a platform to parade its patriotism.¹ Certainly the caretaker government could not have afforded to turn a blind eye to the foreign aggression, but in course, questions have been raised about its political and strategic background, that exposed the incompetence, and inept and ad-hoc decision-making of the government. It is criticised for its "very late" reaction with regard to the Pakistani infiltration into Kargil given the intelligence agencies' colossal failure, and Defence Ministry's initial failure to vacate the claimed intrusion.

Many of the diplomatic advantages that served India well represented a gradual accretion over the years, rather than the outcome of efforts directly related to the Kargil conflict. Moreover, there has been still ambiguity around the actual conduct of diplomacy. Credible reports emerged, for instance, that India communicated its intent to launch full-scale hostilities against Pakistan, unless the US brought its truculent former proxy in the region to heel. Another dubious event was the exchange of personal envoys between the two Prime Ministers, in what was a clumsy effort at "back channel" diplomacy.²

The government also drew *volte face* by the "irresponsible, unnecessary and uncalled for" assertion of its Defence Minister at an all-party meeting on May 29 that Pakistani P.M., Mr. Nawaz Sharif and the ISI were not involved in the events along the LOC. Simultaneously, elements within the ruling coalition

1. Nothing expressed this sentiment in all its coherent malevolence as forcefully as *Panchjanya* editorial (June 20, 1999).

2. *Frontline*, July 30, 1999, pp. 120-122.

and some other outside it took to casting aspersions on the nationalist commitment of some Opposition parties and leaders, and sought to avert a national debate on the government's handling of the Kargil situation on the specious plea that such a debate would lower that moral of the armed forces. The caretaker government once again refused to take the Opposition into confidence on a major issue, and on June 28 at the all-party meeting, it deferred a decision on the Opposition's demand that a special session of Rajya Sabha be convened to discuss the Kargil conflict, since it was the only legislative forum that remained where government could be held accountable for its omissions and commissions.¹ However, the ruling coalition which was in a minority in the Upper House, looked at the Opposition demand with suspicion, and attributed motives to it, apprehending that its lapses, particularly the intelligence failure,² would be exposed.

On July 6, hours before the Election Commission notified the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections, putting into effect the model code of conduct that practically proscribes major policy decisions, the caretaker regime announced a set of measures to salvage the declining fortunes of private telecom operators. Significantly, this followed within a few days after the less-then-

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1. The Opposition's demand for a Rajya Sabha Session has a curious precedent, set during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. Ironically, it was Vajpayee, as the leader of the Bhartiya Jan Singh's parliamentary delegation, who urged P.M. Nehru to convene an "emergency" session of the Parliament to discuss the crisis. Nehru conceded to the demand and convened a parliamentary session on November 8, 1962. Vajpayee, in his speech in the Upper House, accused the Nehru Government of failing to introspect and of neglecting the national security. He wanted an inquiry into why soldiers were not posted in adequate numbers in the NEFA border. *The Hindustan Times*, (November 9, 1962). Congress leaders have pointed out that in 1962, Vajpayee and the Jan Sangh had, even before the war ended, pressed for a critical analysis of what went wrong and criticised the Government. No one had questioned Vajpayee's patriotism even when he had harshly criticised Nehru's "lapses". They wondered whether Vajpayee would now display the same kind of statesmanship as Nehru had in 1962. *Frontline*, (July 30, 1999), pp. 23-26.
 2. Even the Kargil Committee appointed by the Government had a severely narrow remit. Its anodyne terms of reference did not inspire confidence. *Frontline*, (August 27, 1999); pp. 20-24.

tractable Mr. Jagmohan was shifted out of the Ministry of Communications and the portfolio placed under the direct change of the P.M. These measures included a shift in the entire basis of the 1994 Telecom Policy from a fixed-licence-fee arrangement to a more flexible revenue-sharing system. The proposed policy regime had obvious financial implications, which agitated the Opposition.

Caretaker interludes normally witness a resolute exercise of the power of oversight and the advice of the President. Having received a number of petitions from the Opposition parties, on the impropriety of this government's policy, the President thought it appropriate to caution the P.M. about his unseemly administrative zeal. What should have been a confidential exchange of views quickly found its way into the media, where it became the focus of vigorous jousting between partisans and opponents of telecom liberalisation.

As the campaign for the Lok Sabha election began, the ruling coalition tried to demonstrate its 'macho' image before the electorate in different ways. An effort was made to assert that defying the US, India was going a head with its weaponisation programme. The P.M.'s Red Fort declaration on Independence Day of inducting Agni-II into our arsenal was aimed at generating the impression. The sudden release of the draft nuclear doctrine also falls in the same category. What was the urgency of releasing that document before the elections? The fact that it was released by then Principal Secretary to PM, Mr. Brijesh Mishra, and not the National Security Advisory Board members at a full sitting of the NSAB was illustrative of the official seal of approval to it, although propriety demanded, that instead it should have been placed in Parliament (after the constitution of the 13th Lok Sabha) for a thorough parliamentary debate, before throwing it open for public discussion. But the

temptation to draw electoral mileage from it was, indeed, too overpowering to resist¹.

Hence, the basic norms of functioning in an electoral interregnum was overturned by the BJP – led coalition, when a mood of effrontery took hold in quarters proximate for the P.M., a willingness to risk public opprobrium in what may be considered smaller details of policy, hinging on the tacit calculation that the political capital earned in Kargil will sustain a few reckless gambles, in the cause of building up the war-chest of the P.M., and his party.

(IX) START OF NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE'S (NDA) OMNIBUS RIDE – VAJPAYEE AGAIN

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) comprising of the BJP, and its allies was born out of the compulsions of sharing power, and the felt need to expand the political support base of the coalitions following the dissolution of the 12th Lok Sabha. The BJP realised that one of the reasons for the collapse of the 13-months old government led by Mr. Vajpayee was the reluctance of several smaller parties to support the Government or join the ruling coalition. The NDA was conceived of, at that time in order to win over new allies, who may have been holding themselves back because they were suspicious of the BJP's dominance in the coalition, and the likelihood of its trying to enforce its Hindutva agenda on the other constituents. In fact, in order to try and convince the non-BJP NDA constituents and new allies that the BJP would not pursue its own agenda, the BJP went so far as to decide that it would not release its own manifesto, but subscribe to the NDA's common manifesto. Evidently, the formation of the NDA was the part of a strategy with an eye on the post-election scenario: the BJP perhaps

1. *Mainstream*, (August 28, 1999), pp. 2-3.

reckoned that in case it does not emerge as the single largest party, the NDA can claim that it must be recognised as a single entity, since it fought the election under one name, one manifesto and one leader, and therefore, has a more persuasive claim to being invited to form the government than other parties, or (post-election) groupings.

The thirteenth general election – the third in three years – yielded a rather decisive mandate to the BJP, and its 23 regional allies of varied character and background, to govern India from the Centre. The close to 300 seats that the coalition won, represents a striking reversal of the political trends, that were witnessed for much of the period, after the BJP assumed the reins, in April 1998, as head of a smaller coalition that included some of the more volatile elements in India's regional politics. No single big factor, or even a few factors, can help explain the 1999 outcome.

If there was Kargil effect that unexpectedly boosted the stock of Mr. Vajpayee and the BJP across much of the country, this was clearly no Kargil election, as the results in the battleground states of U.P. and Punjab underlined. Further, the Kargil effect was in visible decline during the latter part of a voting exercise spread over a whole month. If it was the 'able' P.M.'s winning image that scored generally, that that took a beating in a few states (Karnataka, Punjab and U.P.), and elsewhere seemed less important than alliance arithmetic (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Maharashtra), or the independent electoral clout of senior regional partners (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal). If there was a strong anti-incumbency factor at work at the state-level (Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Orissa, U.P. and also Maharashtra), Andhra Pradesh seemed to witness the opposite, a pro-incumbency wave, the reversal of 1998 for the DMK in Tamil

Nadu seemed to reward incumbency, and no overriding anti-incumbency mood could be noticed among the voters in the Left-ruled states of Kerala and West-Bengal.

However, there are two striking qualitative factors behind this election outcome. The first is the rather remarkable fact that the Vajpayee government proved more resourceful, and popular in the *caretaker mode* than when it ruled for a year with the backing of a working majority in the Lok Sabha; this change in fortune can be explained largely by Kargil and the response to it, coming on top of the sympathy that was generated by the fall of the government.¹ And this change in fortunes is linked to the second factor: the BJP's main opponent at the National level, the Congress-(I) led by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, can be said to have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The strategic miscalculation that came straight out of the September 1998 Panchmarhi session of the Congress(I) was based on an almost dogmatic belief that under Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's leadership, the party had managed to reverse its long-term decline, had no need of new allies or coalition partners, and was capable of powering its way back into the Central government at any time it choose.² This belief was contradicted by various objective indicators and had an underlying arrogance to it; its sale virtue, it seemed, was the relative absence of opportunism compared with the BJP's re-emphasised willingness to accommodate all and sundry, major

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1. The 1999 elections will be remembered for two things. One, it was the first time since Indira Gandhi's election in 1971 that an incumbent P.M. has been returned to power. Second, it was the first instance when Lok Sabha elections were fought predominantly on the strength of prime-ministerial candidates.
 2. In November 1998, the Congress (I) won impressive victories in the Assembly elections in three battleground states, M.P., Rajasthan and Delhi. In December 1998, an ORG-MARG Public opinion survey published by *India Today* (December 28) predicted that if elections were to be held at that point, the Congress(I) with its few minor allies would win 45% of the votes and 305 Lok Sabha seats compared with 26% of the votes and 135 seats for the BJP and its numerous allies, and that potential voters favoured Sonia Gandhi over Vajpayee, by a four percentage point margin, for Prime Minister.

and minor regional allies, in the hunt for power. The strategic miscalculation led to implementing a game plan for the fall of the Vajpayee government without thinking the nature of an interim secular and democratic alternative that could hold the reins until such time as fresh elections could be forced.

(a) NDA Government: Formation & Operation:

The swearing in of P.M. Mr. Vajpayee and 69 members of his Councils of Ministers by President Narayanan on October 13 at Rashtrapati Bhavan stretched into nearly three weary hours. However, for senior leaders of the ruling coalition, the day marked the celebration of a successful democratic exercise, especially, as some of them pointed out, in the light of the fact that in neighbouring Pakistan, a military coup had replaced a democratically elected government the previous day. For Mr. Vajpayee, putting together a viable governing formation was no easy task. The TDP, with which the BJP had seat adjustments in Andhra Pradesh decided to support the NDA government from the outside. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for Mr. Vajpayee, who was already under pressure from his own party as well as its allies in the matter of ministerial berths. He made no attempt to persuade the TDP to reconsider its decision, although many of its 29 MPs did have ministerial ambitions. Being the second largest party in the ruling coalition, the TDP would have had to be allotted important portfolios.

When asked to comment on the size of his Ministry, Mr. Vajpayee maintained that it was not huge, prompted by the compulsions of coalition government, and because he wanted to give representation to as many of his coalition partners, and as many regions of the country as possible. Home Minister Mr. Advani defended the size of the Ministry by saying that it conformed to the ceiling recommended by the Administrative Reforms Committee (ARC). Way back in the 1960s, the ARC had

recommended that the size of the Union Council of Ministers not exceed 11% of the combined strength of the two Houses of Parliament, which is 793.

Mr. Vajpayee went about his task of Ministry formation in a confident manner, since he believed that his 30-plus majority in the Lok Sabha would discourage any recalcitrant ally from challenging him. He sought the allies' views on who should be included in the Cabinet but told them to accept whatever was offered to them finally. Mr. Vajpayee, who initially planned to start with a 50-member Ministry, was subsequently forced to increase the size. Under the guise of ensuring representation to all regions and classes, the BJP sought berths for several of its veteran leaders. The Ministry-making exercise appeared to have been undertaken cautiously with a view to consolidate the gains made by the BJP, and thereby seeking to expand its reach. As many as 46 of the 70 Ministers belong to the BJP: despite their sizeable presence, its allies got only one-third of the berths. The allocation of portfolios suggested a deliberate move to have at least one BJP Minister of State in the Ministries headed by the alliance parties.

Instead of settling down to serious business, the newly formed Government still seemed to be obsessed with the issue of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. The NDA had in its election manifesto promised to amend the Constitution suitably in order to prevent persons of foreign origin from occupying high constitutional posts. Constitutional amendments need the support of 2/3 of the members of the Lok Sabha. The NDA is, however, way behind this figure. In order to overcome this hurdle, Law-Minister Ram Jethmalani hinted at an amendment to the Citizenship Act, which can achieve the same objective and can be passed with a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. Similarly, sections of the NDA suggested that the stability of the

new Government can be ensured by amending the Lok Sabha Business Rules to ensure that a motion expressing lack of confidence in an incumbent P.M. can be admitted only if it is accompanied by a constructive vote of confidence in an alternative leader.

With the preliminaries over, the winter session of the 13th Lok Sabha began on November 29. Emboldened by the greater security of numbers it enjoys in the Lok Sabha, the NDA Government was in a real hurry to push through laws that are likely to change the course of the country's economy as well as polity. Eager to prove its reformist credentials to the international community in order to win its approval, the Government speeded up the process of economic reforms, a sector which the Congress (I) has trodden with caution. The Government set the ambitious legislative agenda rolling with the introduction of three bills with major ramification - the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Bill, the Prevention of Money-Laundering (PMLB) Bill, and the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Amendment Bill.

The House passed four of the bills in the first week itself without any meaningful debate.¹ In fact, the controversial Foreign Exchange Management (FEMA) Bill, and the ineffectual

1. The Congress (I), the main Opposition party with a majority in the Upper House, had initially made a song and dance about the IRDA Bill and kept the Government on tenterhooks over whether the legislation would get its support. In fact, it hardly had any ideological differences with the Government on this issue, having authored the initial phase of reforms in the first place. Not unexpectedly, it finally decided to play ball, but only after proving a point. It premised its support to the Bills on certain changes that it wanted incorporated in the IRDA Bill. The Bill, which throws open the insurance sector to private and foreign investor, was passed after incorporating the amendments prescribed by the Congress, despite stiff opposition from the Left parties and the insurance employees. A smirking Congress then saw itself as the patron critic of the reform process. *Frontline*, (December 24, 1999), pp. 26-28.

PMLB were taken up and adopted on December 3, at the fag end of the week when several MPs were leaving for their respective constituencies, and the House barely had the quorum. The strategy of burdening the House within a short span with a slew of legislation, which require expert inputs for the conduct of any meaningful debate, appeared to have paid off. The current Lok Sabha will perhaps be remembered as the fastest law-maker in Indian legislative history.

Meanwhile, whatever its underlying rationale, the Government's decision of "retiring" two members of the Prasar Bharti board on November 22 showed a shrewd appreciation of infirmities in the law. The matter of propriety though, is something else, since the two individuals concerned – historian Romila Thaper and Hindi litterateur, Rajendra Yadva – have been zealous in guarding the Prasar Bharti mandate against dilution. It was an attitude that meant almost axiomatically that they were the most liable to run into conflict with the BJP, never known to be overly scrupulous in its regard for the integrity of autonomous institutions. Rationalising the Government's actions, Mr. Arun Jaitley, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, resorted to certain curious locutions. His initial justification was that the electronic media needed a dose of professionalism—a mission to which the talents of a historian and a literacy figure were supposedly superfluous. On closer interrogation about the political motivations underlying the retirement of two known critics of the BJP style of politics, Mr. Jaitley sought to reverse the onus. Since there was no political intent read into their appointment, none, he argued, need to be read into their removal from office. And then, as a lawyer of fair eminence, Mr. Jaitley's final recourse was legalistic. "We have done nothing illegal", he

declared and “if the affected persons thought there were sufficient grounds, they were free to take the Government to court”. Simultaneously, the Sangh Parivar intensified its efforts towards rewriting the standards of schools curriculum revision. The “discussion papers” issued by the Human Resource Development Ministry is not for the revision with a view to updating it. It involves violent recasting and radical changes – in particular, changes in values and ideologies.¹

1. See *Frontline*, December 24, 1999, pp. 108–110.

ISSUE OF GOVERNANCE : IMPACT OF COALITION POLITICS ON THE POLITY

The notion of "governance" can be equated with "sound development management", defined as, "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development."¹ We shall attempt an evaluation of the ideology and politics of the political coalition's project of governance, in terms of its implications for the role of the state; the understanding of politics; democracy and development; and issues of participation and citizenship.

The line of argument here is that governance criteria is both culturally and politically specific – the product of consensus – the outcome of effectuating and sustaining it, requires a certain kind of political negotiation, which can only be the product of democratic politics. In absence of it, emphasis on governance will provide nothing more than an analysis of a dysfunctional elite system. In this context, two interrogations are being tested. Does coalition governance entails more accountability to the citizens of a democratic polity, or are the lending institutions its chief auditors? Conversely, if the formal conditions of coalition are fulfilled does good governance logically follows?

Democracy and development must be seen as intimately related functioning under similar constraints. Thus, for instance, social inequality in India both retards balanced development and distorts the logic of democracy. It is precisely this fact in an unequal society that necessitates state welfare for the protection

1. World Bank : Governance and Development, (Washington D.C., 1992), p.3.

of the vulnerable, for the concerns of distributive justice cannot be fulfilled by governance alone. The answer therefore is not to look towards the state, but at different ways of approaching, and defining both democracy, and development: a view of democracy, for instance, that goes beyond the procedural to seek the substantive democratisation of not only the state, but also society, and social relations; and a view of development that departs possibly from the conventional ways of meaning of this goal by focusing not on GDP and GNP, but on the enlargement of human capabilities and the enhancement of the quality of life for all citizens.¹ The multiple meanings these concepts have acquired in particular societies have emerged out of rich histories of political practise and discourse. Concerns of governance analysed here are necessarily deeply anchored in these meanings and definitions.

First, institutional and procedural setting is analysed, followed by analysis of the attempts to liberalise India's economy, and related policy issues. This culminates in an examination of how coalition rule has dealt with the "basic structure" of Indian democracy, comprising triad of nationalism, secularism and federalism. Clearly these foci are selective, not revealing all the nuances. Observing the government in action in these three broadly important areas will provide a microcosm of the working of power in the coalition era of 1990s. The study of government goals and performances in these areas, has been used as a basis for generalising about the changing nature of power relations in coalition politics.

1. Atul Kohli : "Democratic Amid Economic Orthodoxy : Trends in Developing Countries", *Third World Quarterly*, (Vol. 1, No. 4, 1993), p.683.

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**POLITICAL STRUCTURE : INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN
AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

(I) THE CONSTITUTION : REVIEW IN TRYING TIMES

Ironically enough, the proposal to "review" the Constitution forced itself into public focus as the country celebrated the golden jubilee of its basic document of laws and citizens' right and duties. In India, the need for a new look at the Constitution started being felt after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's draconian emergency, though it got swept under the mat as the Congress returned to power in 1980. But the party's long exit since 1997, and the consequent emergence of coalition rule brought back this issue to centre-stage. The core demand behind is a re-definition of the balance of power between the Centre and the states. The very article 1(1) says "India" that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. "Union" comes first; "States" later. The regional forces who constitute the ruling NDA coalition are now thinking that the states, in all practical sense, should precede the Union in not only emphasis but, actual power.

The opposition blocks including the Congress, the Left and the Samajwadi Party-fear that a new constitutional dispensation will shift more power in to the hands their local rivals like the Samata Party, the Janata Dal (U), the Akali Dal, the Biju Janata Dal and the Trinamul Congress. More power of these parties means a longer lease of life for the for the BJP-led alliance. It also threatens to push the Congress further in to irrelevance and oblivion.

Although it may have been broached on occasions in the past, the notion of the thorough review of the Constitution entered perhaps the political discourse for the first time in the BJP's election manifesto of 1998. This document begins with the

invocation of an eternal Indian mind, that has found its expression in the Indian nation. "It is this ancient Indian mind that formulated the Constitution of India", says the manifesto, and "it is not the Constitution that shaped the Indian mind." This is by any standard of evaluation a rather curious locution. As against the decidedly modern values that Constitution seeks to enshrine—equality, the rule of law, secularism, the separation of powers—the BJP was seeking to invoke a primordial inspiration for the Indian polity, and its system of laws. This rather backward-looking perspective endowed the BJP's subsequent promise to "review the Constitution, in the light of the experience of the past 50 years", with a certain ominous quality.

The BJP was until recently, a staunch advocate of a presidential system of government, which presumably would eliminate the multiple sources of uncertainty, and instability that parliamentary democracy is prone to in the coalition rule. It found little purchase for this idea, since the dominant sentiment in political quarters was that the presidential system tilts too strongly towards a variety of political absolutism, that a fledgling democracy cannot afford. In 1998, the promise to "review" the Constitution was read as an effort to recycle this old proposal, and seek more far-reaching changes in the system of governance.

The idea nevertheless found its way subsequently into the BJP-led coalition's National Agenda for Governance in 1999. The NDA Government's resolve has been expressed by all the senior leaders of the party since the alliance gained absolute majority in the Lok Sabha in the 1999 general elections. Articulating this Union Home Minister Mr. L.K. Advani, on 21 November, 1999, announced in his address to the FICCI that the government had decided to 'initiate' far-reaching reforms in the administration,

judiciary, and the internal security system 'to evolve an "effective state" which could be an inspiring instrument of change in the economic sphere and simultaneously bring about rapid social development'. The setting up of the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) flowed naturally from this intention.

Although stripped of its metaphysical content by this time, the notion could not be viewed in neutral terms, simply because of the circumstances of its origin. The golden jubilee of the Indian Republic provided the Vajpayee government to begin the process of implementing this election commitment by announcing the set up of a national commission, headed by former chief justice Mr. M.N. Venkatachelliah to review the working of the Constitution. Other members short-listed so far includes constitutional experts like Mr. Fali Nariman and Mr. Ashok Desai, former Lok Sabha secretary-general Mr. Subhash Kashyap, former solicitor-general Mr. K. Parasaran, ex-home secretary Mr. Madhav Godbole, former justice Mr. R.S. Sarkaria of Sarkaria Commission fame, former Speaker Mr. P.A. Sangma, lawyer Mr. Anil Dhawan, journalist C.R. Irani, Justice (retired) Mr. B.P. Jeevan Reddy of the Law Commission and Attorney General Mr. Soli Sorabjee.

According to the Union Law Ministry's background note on the issue, an Overview Committee, consisting of Prof. Mool Chand Sharma, Mr. R.K.P. Shankardass, Mr. Setia Vaidialingam, and Prof. Ghanshyam Singh, has pointed at five possible approach-routes to reform:

Decentralisation of Power: The Seventh Schedule provides the lots of matters divided under the Union List, the state list, and the concurrent list. The 97 items under the Union list (compared to 66 under the state list) put too much power and responsibility in the hands of the Centre. All infrastructure facilities—railways, telecom, port, airlines—are on the Union list

though the States fortunes depend on their working. In this era of liberalisation, it is ironical the Centre retains its hold over, among all things, "the stock exchanges and future market". The reform may give more financial autonomy to the states and also a new federal twist to the entire Constitution.

Stability at the Centre: Article 75(3) says that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People (Lok Sabha). But there are not enough safeguards in the Tenth Schedule, also known as the Anti-Defection Act, against horse-trading of legislators, sudden or irrational switching of loyalty, and the consequent dismissal of the cabinet, causing cumbersome, and expensive mid-term polls. In the past 10 years, there have been seven changes in the government. Such instability at the Centre takes a huge toll on the smaller and regional parties who are made to bend over backwards to find the resources for facing frequent elections. The reform may address this problem, perhaps by introducing the German practice in which no-confidence vote is not entertained unless those who want to pull down the government are ready with an alternative leadership, ensuring full term for Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

Judicial Accountability: Article 124(2) says that every judge of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President, meaning the executive. The wording of the subsequent lines—and a series of judgements of the Supreme Court—have turned the judiciary into a self-appointing community. During four decades of uninterrupted Congress hegemony, the executive held the key to judicial appointments, and transfers. The coalition politicians of today cannot accept an outright change in the power-balance with the judiciary now. The Commission may consider the prospect of changing the provision and make room for a National

Judicial Commission for transfer and appointment of Supreme Court, and High Court judges in which the political executive also has a role.

The Centre's Power to Dismiss State Governments:

Article 358 is a much misapplied provision which enables the Centre to dismiss the state governments on the plea of breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the concerned states. To reform Article 356 is a constant refrain of the BJP's partners in the NDA, many of whom have the experience of being its victim, particularly when the Congress was all powerful.

Financial Autonomy to the States: The chapter of Finance in Part XII, from Article 265 to 293, dealing with the distribution the states has become a bone of contention in Centre- State relations. The Sarkaria Commission called for certain changes which have not been brought about. The devolution of funds through the Finance Commission has a touch of the *mansabdari* system of the Mughal period, with the Centre acting as the benevolent parent in doling out shares of tax revenues. These are up for change for a more equitable distribution of resources.

Critics of the government's intent insist that on all these questions, there exist a sufficient weight or precedent and judicial rulings, that can through political dialogue, and consensus be operationalised within the Constitution. They believe that the BJP's ultimate purpose is to graft an artificial notion of political stability on the basic law, which could prove harmful to the more valuable notion of accountability. But the Congress—a bit slow on the uptake after its disastrous performance in 1999 mid-term poll, and the Opposition ignored the simmering demand for changes in the agenda of the

Republic-found themselves in a dilemma as a result of the move. While they must oppose it for the sake of opposition, issues involved in the review are sure to touch a raw nerve even among the future alliance of the Congress. The Left, for that matter, traditionally clamoured for more power to the states.

The President Mr. K.R. Naryanan, on his part, forcefully articulated his concerns in his address on 27 January, 2000 at the special function in the Central Hall of Parliament. Inherent in the President's intervention was a resounding reproach, and he was at pains to point out that great thought, and deliberation had gone into the choice of the appropriate form of government for the country. He reminded that : "In such as predicament, described by one writer as one of a million mutinies", there must be in the body politic a vent of discontents and frustrations to express themselves in order to forestall and prevent major explosions in society. The parliamentary system provides this vent more than a system which prefers stability to accountability and responsibility.¹ The value of this system was not in any way diminished by the recent experience of instability in government, said the President. "In my opinion we should avoid too much rigidity in our system of government as in a very rigid system there is a danger of major explosions in society taking place. The possibility and the facility of a change in government is itself a factor in the stability of the political system in the long run because then the people will be more inclined to tolerate a political situation they do not approve of or find difficult to cope with for long."²

This Presidential intervention followed a fairly clear-cut articulation by the P.M. Mr. Vajpayee of an intent to review the

1. *The Hindu*, 28 January, 2000.

2. *Ibid*.

Constitution lending it added piquancy. He spelt out his perception on the issue by drawing attention to the "acutely" felt need for stability both at the Centre and in the States, to ensure faster socio-economic development. The Constitution, he said, was not immutable, since "even in the mightiest fort one has to repair the parapet from time to time. One has to clean and check the banisters.... the same is true of our Constitution. While the Constitution has stood the test of time, five decades after its adoption, India was faced with a "new situation", he suggested. The P.M. reiterated his full and unreserved acceptance of the validity of the *Keshavananda Bharati Case* by the Supreme Court. Nobody in the BJP has yet spoken openly in terms of abrogating the parliamentary system of governance in preference to the Presidential system, although Law Minister Mr. Ram Jethmalani did, in a subsequent intervention, said that the review committee would be free to consider the proposals to this effect.

Stirring at the roots of this divergence are contrasting approaches to the task of improving the quality of governance, and ensuring political accountability. The President evidently believes that the institutions, and the enabling powers already exist to permit an enlightened debate on the experience of the last 50 years. The Government, in contrast, thinks that a new institution should be created to raise the level of debate. Opposition parties, however, believe that in the process of choosing a committee, the government can also determine the nature of the outcome of its deliberations. What makes the intentions of the votaries of the CRC, a suspect is that political misuse of several constitutional provisions over the years and the resolve to stop such misuse has not found a place in this discourse. The fact that simultaneously with the desire for

appointing a CRC, the party leadership began announcing desired changes in the Constitution indicated the BJP's preconceived agenda of indulging in political brinkmanship, exemplified by the vigorous campaign by its intellectual brigade highlighting the dangers of instability of coalition.

In fact, what has been referred, time and again as a fractured verdict, i.e., the electorates failure to give a clean verdict in favour of one political party, is in fact a reflection of the fractured party system, and due to the significant decline in the party system, the need for accountability is growing in India. Tragically, the political parties, and leaders who have spoken so emphatically in support of the Second Indian Republic based on the US model, have not made a single suggestion regarding repairing the fractured party system they are part of. Neither Mr. R. Venkataraman, who had set the ball rolling in 1965 by sending a note to the AICC and has repeated his suggestions in the past decade, nor the BJP leaders, and others supporting their demands, have spoken even once about resuscitating the ailing party system. In fact, each one of them has tried to benefit from it.

No constitutional change is required to reform the party system. Electoral reforms, particularly a review of the first-past-the post-system, and a consideration of the partial-list-system as prevalent in Germany, state funding of elections, sharpening of the Anti-Defection Law, auditing of the accounts of political parties and rules for ensuring inner-party democracy are measures that do not require constitutional change for a healthier political life in the country. The politicians and political parties have initiated the debate on systemic change by overplaying the fear of instability without attending to its root

cause a weak and ailing party system. The debate will thus linger on, giving the BJP a prize issue to overshadow all conventional measuring sticks of performance in the next elections. Having ascended to power after waiting on the political sidelines of the country for nearly five decades, the BJP seems to be in a terrible hurry to consolidate its hold on power—legitimising itself by delegitimising the Constitution.

(II) THE PRESIDENT : ALTERING CONTOURS OF SUPREME EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY

In 1998–99, there were some murmurs over the President's description of his role as that of a "working President." Contextually, this formulation was used by President Mr. Narayanan to distinguish his times in Rashtrapati Bhawan from the earlier conception of the job as "that of a rubber-stamp President." "I thought, I will have a lot of time, leisure for reading, writing, walking, etc. But somehow I find I cannot get it now. So, my image of President is of a working President, not an executive President, but a working President, and working within the four corners of the Constitution," which, he noted "gives very little direct power or influence to him to interface in matters or affect the cause of events, but there is a subtle-influence of the office...on the executive and the other arms of the Government and on the public as whole. It is a position which has to be used with the, what shall I say, with the philosophy of indirect approach... in tune with the popular expectations".¹

As the country entered into a new era of coalitions, the Presidency, got invested with a pivotal role, unknown in the past. In this farewell address to MPs, President Mr. R. Venkataraman said that the President of India is like an emergency lamp. When

1. *Frontline*, (September 11, 1998), pp. 132–134.

power fails, the emergency lamp comes into operation and when power is restored, the lamp becomes dormant.¹ Though, the President is constitutionally mandated to act on the advice given by the cabinet,² but this is subjected to certain exception which can be placed in two categories : first, the execution is carved out expressly or by necessary implication in the text of the Constitution itself,³ and second, arises out of the convention evolved to meet unforeseen developments because the written Constitution is silent on this. The first category differs from the second also in the sense that in the former the satisfaction in reality is that of other constitutional functionaries, while in the latter it pertains to be President's own satisfaction.

Exceptions spelt explicitly or implicitly in the written text of the Constitution itself is not as problematic as exception springing from the existence of the grey area which in turn is the result of constitutional taciturnity. In this category also there exist two exception : first, the choice of the P.M. and second, dissolution of the Lok Sabha on the advice of the House. The most important function of the President is the appointment of a P.M. and it is well established convention in both England and India that if after the general elections, a single party secures a majority in the House, its leader must be appointed as the P.M. However, the Constitution is silent on what the President should do if no party is in position to command a majority in the House. The role of President in such situation, as has been the recurrent story throughout the 1990s, becomes crucial and the Presidential discretion assumes tremendous significance.

1. R. Venkataraman: "Constitutional Conventions", the First Viswanathan Dola Endowment Lecture, Chennai, April, 24, 1996.

2. Article 74(1); Article 75 (3).

3. Article 103 ; Article 217.

Angulated from this interpretation, such a situation arose in India after the general elections of 1989. The Congress though not the majority party was the largest single unit with the Janata, BJP and others in descending order of strength. The opposition parties agreed among themselves to support the JD from outside without forming a coalition. The issue before the President was : who should be invited to form the Government ? The Congress which was defeated in the polls, but which had the largest membership in the Lok Sabha did not stake its claim to form the government. The President, following a British precedent¹, called on the next party in order of strength, JD, headed by Mr. V.P. Singh, to form the government. Then other political parties later met the President and pledged support to Mr. V. P. Singh. The President told them that he called the next largest party to form the government, and that it was for other parties to demonstrate their support in the House.²

Some jurists have argued that the President's goal must obviously be to get a viable government, and that he should be free to call any person who in his opinion is able to provide one. The Sarkaria Commission while laying down guidelines for Governors in the choice of the party for forming the government

1. In 1923, Baldwin, the Conservative P.M., advised the dissolution of the House as he wanted to get a mandate from the people for his Tariff Policy and the Crown accepted it. In the general elections, which followed in December 1923, his party was defeated but still remained the largest single party with Labour and Liberals in descending order of strength. In these circumstances, King George-V said that "Baldwin wished to resign, he (the King) would refuse on the ground that he is still the head of the largest single party in the House of Commons." (Quoted from *Baldwin* by Montgomery Hyde, p.197). When Baldwin was defeated in the House in January 1924 on the address to the throne, the King had the option either of calling Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party with 191 members, or Asquith, the leader of the Liberal Party with 158 members. The King invited MacDonald "as the leader of the next largest party in the Commons to form the administration" (quoted from *Baldwin* by Hyde, p. 199) which he did with the help of the liberals. op. cit., R. Venkataraman: *My Presidential Years*, (New Delhi, Stard, 1996), p. 246.

2. Vide, Ibid., p. 275.

said, failing a party with absolute majority, a combination of parties which is able to command a majority in the House should be given next opportunity. This, according to Mr. Venkataraman, "introduces an element of subjective judgement on the part of the President or the Governor in the choice and exposes them to charges of partisan or biased decisions. On other hand, calling parties in order of their strength will certainly be most prudent and non-controversial course of action".¹ Again in 1991 when no party had a majority in the Lok Sabha, the President invited the leader of the then largest single party- the Congress- and on his acceptance of responsibility appointed him as the P.M. It was also palpably fair to all parties.

The Constitution states that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House, which means that it shall have a majority in the House, and not of the House. However, the Constitution does not prescribe that for passing a vote of confidence or no confidence a majority of the membership of the House is required. However, whether a group has a majority in the House or not can be tested only in the House, and not anywhere else. So, in 1990, when the BJP, whose support ensured a majority in the House to Mr. V. P. Singh's government, communicated to the President their withdrawal of support to the ruling party, the President did not take note of it, but allowed the majority to be tested in the House. The President, however, advised the then P.M. Mr. Singh, to take a vote of confidence in the House.²

Moreover, the opinion is divided on whether the advice of the P.M. defeated in the House is binding on the President. Some jurists have argued the he should examine before ordering

1. Ibid., p. 321.

2. Vide, Ibid., pp. 361-362.

dissolution whether a viable alternative government could be formed, and whether the condition in the country would warrant the holding of general elections. Others, however, hold that the advice of the P.M., whether in office or defeated, should be accepted, since P.M. is a P.M. with all the rights conferred on him, constitutionally, and if the President, does not accept his advice, and goes for alternative government of his choice, he is bound to enter into a real of controversy from which there could be no respite. Legal, and constitutional assessment of the President has to be linked to political assessment of the issue, as the Constitution cannot provide for all contingencies in national life.¹ In India, the words in Article 74 (1) that the President shall act in accordance with the advice of the P.M., and Council of Ministers, if strictly interpreted, according to N.A. Palkhiwala, would leave no option to the President but to order the dissolution of the House even if the advice was perverse or the conditions did not warrant such action.²

In 1990, when Mr. V. P. Singh lost the confidence motion, he advised the dissolution of the House, and tendered resignation, so that the process of formation of a new government could begin, the President engaged himself in the task of finding an alternative government by sounding the other parties successively in order of their strength. His invitation the Mr. Chandrashekhar to form the Ministry, and reluctance for seven days, from March 6 till March 13, 1991 to dissolve the Ninth Lok Sabha, subjected to lot of controversy. The opposition parties, warning that they would not co-operate in passing the crucial bills in Parliament if the former does not dissolve the Lok

1. Kamla Kant Panda: "Politics of Instability and Role of the President in the Indian Parliamentary Model", *Teaching Politics*, (vol. XVII, No. 12, 1991), p. 63.

2. N.A. Palkhiwala : *We, the Nation* (New Delhi, U.B.S., 1994), p. 57.

Sabha, and order fresh elections, were some of the unhealthy developments that forced the Presidency to be brought in public scrutiny.

In 1991, when P.M. Mr. Chandrashekhar resigned without facing a vote of the House on the Motion of Thanks, he sought dissolution of the House. Though, technically, he was not defeated in the House, it was obvious that he did not have the support of the majority. In view of the fluid constitutional law on the issue, the President on that occasion relied on an additional factor for ordering dissolution, namely, that no political party had staked a claim to form the government.¹ The President in that case did not commit himself that he was bound by the advice of the outgoing P.M.

The constitutional issue whether the President was bound by the advice of a Ministry which had resigned, and which was continuing in the office at the request of the President till the alternative arrangements were made arose during the period when the Mr. Chandrashekar Ministry continued in office after its resignation. The Ministry wanted to enter into some contracts involving several thousand cores of rupees, and buy some aircraft. The President advised, that Ministry continuing in office after resignation should not commit the future Ministry to heavy financial obligations nor initiate new policies pending election. It was then argued that the Constitution did not place any such restrictions on the Ministry in that situation, and that the President could at best return the proposal for reconsideration by the Council of Ministers under the proviso to Article 74 (1). Fortunately the crisis was resolved by Mr. Chandrashekar with statesman like wisdom, accepting the President's view. Likewise,

1. Vide Venkataraman, *Ibid*, p. 412.

on an earlier occasion, when in similar circumstances Mr. V. P. Singh's Ministry, wanted to issue a number of sugar mill licenses, the P.M. gracefully accepted the President's advice against the proposal without demur, and dropped its proposal.¹ Recently, in 1999, when the B.J.P. led coalition of caretaker government, tried to indulge in political adventure, it received a rap from the President, Mr. Narayanan, on the issues of telecom policy, and the Prasar Bharti Bill.

Political controversy again rose when President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma appointed Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader of the B.J.P., as P.M. on condition that he should win the confidence of the Lok Sabha by May 31, 1996. In performing the constitutional constitutionally proper act under Article 75, he was guided by the conventions, and precedents set by his predecessors, Mr. N. Sanjeeva Reddy and Mr. R. Venkataraman who had the unique distinction of swearing in five P.M. during a tenure as many years. Controversy did not arise when the latter appointed Mr. V. P. Singh, P. M. in 1989, since the political leaders of all parties had accepted his decision. In 1996, however, the Congress as the single second largest party opted out of the race, and the President's choice lay between the B.J.P. and the NF-LF combine. The President's action raised the controversy because of hurried election of Mr. Deve Gowda, as leader of the NF, and the unanimous support extended to his by the Left, and the entire range of regional parties, barring the Akali Dal. More so, because the Congress, too finally went along the decision. But the leadership issue was handled rather ineptly, and there was much uncertainty, and bickering before a sort of unity was forged by the NF-LF combine.

1. Ibid., p. 423 onwards.

Both Mr. Venkataraman, and Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy had brushed aside the criticism, that the stipulation to test strength in the House amounted to imposing a condition, and former did cite the order of the Karnataka High Court those days rejecting a petition against the "condition" and saying that the stipulation was in keeping with well-known conventions. However, there are critics who feel that Dr. Sharma could be faulted in giving Mr. Vajpayee as much as a fortnight, to prove his majority. Rather, than going strictly by convention, the President could have taken into account the circumstances which produced a fractured verdict, and a hung Parliament, and a minority government, as was then the case, should be asked to test its support within a few days, perhaps even just two or three days. The fact that Mr. Gowda was on the verge of securing majority support should have been additional factor for reducing the time-frame set for Mr. Vajpayee. The President in offering him the chance of forming the Government, could easily have ascertained whether Mr. Vajpayee would be in a position to get the help of members of some other parties, to keep him in power. It is still unclear as to why the President did not choose this course, and instead straightaway swore him as the PM. The argument, that being the leader of the single largest party Mr. Vajpayee had a right to be given the first chance does not seem to well founded especially when takes into account that the BJP needed the support of at least 70 more members which in then existing circumstances of party affiliations was next to impossible. In fact, there is the precedent of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi declining a similar offer, when the Congress was returned as the single largest party.

The President, it is felt, should have paid attention to the nuances of the situation, and not merely played it safe by calling upon the leader of the largest party. He could have asked the

respective leaders to give proof of the support each could get before taking the step of appointing one as P.M. If that had been done, the fiasco of the short-lived BJP Government may have been avoided. Equally, important is the issue of democracy. It is the constitutional responsibility of the President under Article 74, and 75 to give effect to the decision of the people. While the electorate did not indicate its clear preference, certain broad conclusions could be drawn from the results: (i) the Congress was defeated; (ii) the BJP in spite of its Hindutva appeal could not win majority in the South, and was rejected in the East; (iii) between these two parties, was a conglomeration of national and regional parties of diverse ideological views, and no common programme (that emerged much later), and no accepted leader who could qualify as the candidate for P.M. post. Its slender bond of unity was its common dislike of the BJP and the Congress.

The President's foremost concern was to do justice to the democratic system and defend the Constitution, for he has taken oath to preserve, maintain and protect it. Under the nebulous political condition, he had to find which party or a combination of parties had the greatest chance of running a stable government. The invitation to the BJP as the single largest party could not faulted rationally; it was fair enough in the circumstances. After all, by providing the condition of seeking a vote of confidence, the President left ample scope for the M.P.s to decide the fate of the BJP Government. In 1997, when, Mr. Kesari, the Congress President demanded, that, since the Congress had withdrawn support, the P.M. Mr. Gowda be asked to step down immediately, and also staked its claim to form an alternative government, while the UF government, though visibly

shaken, decided not to step down, the President Mr. Sharma pondered over the possible options available to him – (i) asking the P.M. to prove his majority in the Lok Sabha; (ii) if the P.M. lost the vote of confidence, inviting the leader of a party or group who could form a stable government; (iii) asking the Lok-Sabha to elect a new leader ; (iv) dissolving the Lok Sabha (if none of the first three option worked) and calling for fresh elections. Finally, he formally issued a communiqué advising the P.M. to seek a vote of confidence. Later, after Mr. Gowda stepped down and the UF-Steering Committee notified the President of its decision of electing Mr. Gujral as the leader of UF parliamentary party, the President, appointed him as P.M. only after receiving assurance from Mr. Kesari about the Congress' support to the UF. Also the necessity to create a co-ordination committee of the two parties arose consequent to Dr. Sharma wanting to know from both Mr. Kesari and Mr. Naidu (UF convenor), how they could provide stability in the Centre.

Again, in 1999, the President Narayanan was accused of creating instability at the Centre by advising the P.M. Mr. Vajpayee to seek a confidence vote following the formal withdrawal of support by the 18-member AIADMK group. Two important points are noteworthy here. First, after the official withdrawal of the AIADMK's support, the government was clearly reduced to a minority. That between that date and the confidence motion was voted, several rapid (quicksand-type) changes occurred in the various alignments—evidence of the strong possibility of 'horse-trading', and the self preservation of the Lok Sabha members who were afraid of facing the electorate. The President was constitutionally upright in suggesting that the government seek a vote of confidence when Parliament resembles (as the body was in recess at that time), and Mr. Vajpayee should

have on its own tendered its resignation much before the President's advice.¹

Another area which has led to a controversy regarding the President's powers related to the imposition of President's Rule on states under Article 356 of the Constitution. It is well established the President's satisfaction regarding the need for its imposition is not this personal satisfaction, but that of the Union Government and the propriety of the Government's action is justifiable. Normally the President acts in such cases in accordance with the advice of the Council of Ministers. If India is a federation, then Article 356 has proved itself benighted many times over—two applications a year since the Republican Constitution was adopted. What is remarkable, and very nearly a indictment of the institution of the head of state, is that no President of India, sworn to "preserve, protect and defend" the Constitution, thought it fit to question even one application of the knife — until Mr. K. R. Narayanan came along and came up against the case of Mr. Kalyan Singh, U.P. vs. the Congress (I)-backed UF Central government in October 1997.

President Narayanan, to his great credit, broke with precedent by taking his stand by the book. This he did thoughtfully and meticulously, well prepared by his reading habit, and the response from political India and from all quarters of popular opinion to what was perceived to be an independent, timely and just act by a low-key figure has been edifying. But breaking with precedent also meant, in the case of a Constitutional President, venturing not very far from the well-trodden task. The potency and efficacy of the presidential intervention, in refusing to blindly accept the Union Cabinet

1. What, in this context, is most revolting was the surreptitious manner in which sections of the media launched a campaign against the President, hinting at a so-called "Dalit uprising" against the BJP in league with Mayawati and Giridhar Gomas, thereby accusing him of rank partisanship.

recommendation, did not imply in the least any kind of constitutional adventuresome (or threatened confrontation with the government of the day *a la* Mr. Zail Singh). In a volatile context dominated by political shakiness and uncertainty, and featuring a 'weak' minority government (subject to a host of pressures) and relatively strong States: it was moral and political influence of a constitutional, yet personal action from the top that was admired beyond all expectation and which prevailed.

Since the Constitution does not really provide sufficient and clear guidance on when or under what specified circumstances the knife of article 356 can be applied for the greater good of the Republic, so going by the book means going by a creative reading of it by a Supreme Court majority (five against four) in a landmark judgement pronounced on March 11, 1994, in the Bommai case.¹ The President did more than merely save a legitimate state-government; he also fulfilled his mandate as the Constitution's ultimate keeper. That Mr. Kalyan Singh regime had proved its majority in the Assembly and that the governor's report seeking its dismissal was patently falsified was there for all to see.

However, opinions were divided on Mr. Narayanan's decision to return the recommendation of the Union Council of

1. In its judgement, the apex court said that action under Article 356 is judicially reviewable. The power conferred by the provision, is a conditional power and the President's satisfaction, which is necessarily "subjective", must be formed on "relevant material". The higher courts can very properly scrutinise the material on which the Proclamation is issued, notwithstanding the restriction laid down in Article 74(2). No irreversible action, i.e., dissolution of the Legislative Assembly, is permissible until both Houses of Parliament approve it, until then the most the Central Executive can do is keep the Assembly in "suspended animation". Even after, parliamentary approval, courts can, in fit cases, restore the *status quo ante* in terms of both legislature and Ministry. States has rights, enforceable entitlements that flow directly from the Constitution. Also in the case of an incumbent State government a floor test is obligatory, unless the rarest of rare cases arises (signifying virtual civil war conditions).

Ministers for the imposition of Central rule in Bihar in 1998, and provoked a national debate more on the power of the President than on the use of Article 356, because Mr. Narayanan had returned such a recommendation successively. Two views have been expressed about the President's position. The first view is that as a Constitutional Head of government his position corresponds to that of the British Monarch who reigns but does not rule and, like the Sovereign, the President is under an obligation to act on the advice of his Council of Minister. But the contrary view is that the President's oath is unique which enjoins an extra duty on him apart from defending the Constitution (under Article 61 he can be impeached for the violation of the Constitution), "that I shall devote myself to the service and well-being of the people of India." One cannot gloss over the fact that no other constitutional functionary is administered such an oath.

It is true that Article 74 (2) provides that the President can return any recommendation once for reconsideration and the 42nd Amendment made it explicit what was implicit in the Article but the President's wish can be honoured only if he uses the discretion in the rarest of rare cases. If it becomes a routine feature it will not only lower the august office of the President but he will be a party to the bitter political controversies and power games which he is not supposed to be, since he holds an elected office which he comes to occupy after bitter political rivalry (as was evident in the case of Dr. V.V. Giri when his candidature split the ruling party), and in India (with the exception of Dr. Radhakrishnan) all Presidents were active politicians, who hold office for a fixed tenure, so they cannot symbolise national unity like the British Monarch.¹

1. Sadhanshu Ranjan : "Presidential Activism", *Mainstream*, (November 7, 1998), pp. 11-12.

In the case of Bihar, what has irked the critics of the Bihar Government most was, that the President had not only returned the recommendation, but had given his finding which was tantamount to asking the government not to reconsider, but to review its decision. The President can enlist his objections, but, cannot give his finding, and the line of demarcation between the two is wafer thin. They agreed, that anyone giving moral judgement on Bihar should stay for sometime in the State before doing so, and then they would realise the enormity of the 'ordered anarchy'¹ obtaining in the State. The President reference to the Sarkaria Commission's Report was found wanting as the government never adopted it, leave alone accepted. He had questioned the wisdom of keeping the Assembly in suspended animation, as it would encourage horse-trading. This apprehension was not misplaced, but it certainly betrays a lack of faith in the integrity of the people's representatives, and puts a question mark on democracy itself. Where the President had been inconsistent was in writing a Minute endorsing the Vajpayee Government's action in Bihar. This, in effect, nullified the greater part of well-nuanced presidential objection recorded in the Minute of September, 25, 1998.²

1. An expression used by Mahatma Gandhi to describe British rule where all the lawlessness, according to him, was at the behest of the government.

2. In this the President had opposed the imposition of the President's Rule on four clear grounds: (1) The condition precedent for the invocation of Article 356, has not been adequately made and by the Governor. (2) It would be imprudent to take action under the Article 356 in Bihar when the Union has not taken preliminary steps such as warnings, directives, and eliciting explanation from the State. The absence of such warning can render the issue - fundamentally vulnerable in the Courts of Law.; (3) The fact that the (state) government enjoys majority support in the Assembly has to borne in mind as per the Sarkaria (Commission) passage cited in the Bommai judgement.; (4) While recommending an enactment such as this (the) Government would do well to take into account its passage in both the Houses of Parliament. It would serve little purpose, least of all to the cause of good governance in Bihar, if the Proclamation were to fail to obtain parliamentary approval, as it needs must, in terms of the Constitution. Ultimately, Bihar and other regions afflicted by the kind of malaise described by the Government need a restorative combination of political, social, economic and administrative measures. President's Rule must be understood to be a short-term measure, which "cannot subserve the larger end."

Anyway, the President's decision raised some vital constitutional issues: whether it is possible to define any objective yardstick for invocation of article 356, and why did the Centre not resort to Article 355 under which it can give warning to an erring State which the State Government will be bound to obey. The President, in the meantime, has to live up to his oath of devoting himself to the well-being of the people and at the same time ensure that his actions do not raise any hackles which requires him to be extremely circumspect. There is, of course, the risk that a less copybook President than Narayanan will simply join the intrigue rather than rise above it. The two major cases of U.P. in June 1995 and Gujarat in September-October, 1996 offer in point.¹

Upholding the bastion of 'the Presidential Activism', Mr. K. R. Narayan in his interface with the judiciary, expressed the similar spirit. In the backdrop of the dispute between the Chief Justice of India (CJI), and the Central Government over of appointment of Judges of the Supreme Court, and Chief Justices, and Judges of the High Courts, and their transfer, his initiative with the reference of nine legal questions to the Supreme Court on July 27, 1998, under Article 143(1)² has been regarded as a significant move, considered to be the only way to resolve the stand-off between the two wings of government.³

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1. In U.P., governor "in his discretion" with the strings pulled by the Centre, refused to allow floor test and, all in a day's work, dismissed the Mulayam Singh Ministry, hobnobbed with a BJP delegation and swore in the first Mayawati Ministry. In Gujarat, the governor gave a precariously placed C.M. seven days to forge a majority.
 2. It states that "if at any time it appears to the President that a question of law or fact has arisen, which is such a nature and of such importance that it is expedient to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court upon it, he may refer the question to that Court for consideration and the Court may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report to the President its opinion thereon."
 3. *Frontline*, August 28, 1998, pp. 84-85.

The presidential reference, which followed the advice to the President by the Union Council of Ministers was the most appropriate development under the circumstances and was considered a "master-stroke" and a "sensible decision"—a dignified way of averting a confrontation.¹ However, in mid-November, 1998 when the CJI sent four names for appointment as justices to the Government for approval, the President's Secretariat took several days to react, and finally giving it assent on November 28, 1998, Mr. Narayan wrote: "I would like to record my views that while recommending the appointment of Supreme Court judges, it would be consonant with constitutional principles, and the nation's social objectives if persons belonging to weaker sections of society like SCs and STs, who comprise 25% of the population, and women are given due consideration". If that wasn't enough, he went on to note: "Eligible persons from these categories are available, and their underrepresentation or non-representation would not be justifiable".²

It was for the first time in the history of the history of the Republic that a President had chosen to put his suggestions on record, though constitutionally he has no power in that matter. Apart from having the potential to cast aspersions on the selection process, the Union Government's legal experts were worried that the President was propounding a new theory of affirmative action for judicial appointments— a Pandora's Box that will have a wider impact on services like armed forces, where the Government has so far strictly kept out reservations on the basis of caste. The President was also seen to have decided to act as a check on the judiciary at a time when even the executive seemed to have accepted judicial supremacy over

1. Ibid.

2. *India Today*, January 25, 1999, pp. 21–24.

the issue. Much to the chagrin of the judiciary, the President's Secretariat begun scrutinising all judicial appointments with a fine-toothed comb. Especially as CJI, Mr. A. S. Anand pointed out: "Unless a very serious charge comes to the notice of the government, the approval of judges by the government is a formality", and "I would like to assert that merit alone has been the criterion for selection of judges, as envisaged by our Constitution and no discrimination has been done while making it."¹

In December, 1998, Mr. Narayanan returned a file pertaining to the transfer of judges. The President's office found fault with the CJI's recommendations pointing out stiffly that many of the procedures laid down by the judgement on appointment² was not being observed. Technically, the President was right, and despite CJI reiteration of being righteous legally, he remained dissatisfied, and in another recent case in June 1999 he wrote to the Government for the amendment or substitution of the prevailing Memorandum of Procedure taking into account the new advisory opinion, in order to avoid procedural ambiguities, and confusion in this regard.³ The Law Ministry has already started work on this, meanwhile, the President continues to dig in his heels on most appointments, which is likely to escalate the confrontation between him, and higher judiciary. For the time, the political leadership and the bureaucracy have distanced themselves from this "counting controversy", but sooner than later they may find themselves

1. Ibid.

2. On October 28, 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that in the appointment of Supreme Court Judges, the CJI would constitute a collegium of four of the seniormost judges to recommend a candidate for the Union Government to approve.

3. *India Today*, Ibid.

drawn into an acrimonious battle that bodes ill not just for the pillars of the country's democracy but for India itself.

The other point to be noted is that once inside Rashtrapati Bhavan, politician-turned-Presidents have tended to become over-sensitive to popular, and media reaction to their status, and decision on constitutional matters, in the era of uncertainties". Mr. Venkataraman, thought it necessary to issue an official press release from Rashtrapati Bhavan explaining whys, and hows of his decision on each occasion, largely due to the fear that the media might misinterpret or fail to comprehend the constitutional-legal nuances of his decision.¹ Dr. Sharma too, getting agitated, almost at the end of his tenure, about his role on three different occasions following the indecisive verdict of the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, and being criticised by Mr. Advani for installing Mr. I.K.Gujral as the P.M., leading the same team of ministers of Mr. Gowda as "unethical", took initiative in summoning a 'Governors' Conference', in regard to the role of Constitutional Heads' in dealing with hung houses. This was seen as the President seeking endorsement of his role from political parties at a formal gathering of governors who themselves might well be put in situations like the one Dr. Sharma faced.² And what distinguished Mr. Narayanan's interview to N. Ram, editor of the 'The Hindu', broadcast on national public T.V. and radio on the last day of India's 51st year of Independence, from Independence Day speeches, (which often appear to be photocopies of speeches made a year earlier, with a few modifications of colour rather than substance), was its sincerity of its purpose. The President, engaged from the pedestal of his metaphorical ceremonial throne, but as the President of a democratic nation, accountable to the citizens he

1. S. Viswan: "Outcome of President's Initiative", *Mainstream*, (June 21, 1997), pp. 3-5.

2. Ibid.

holds office on behalf of, replacing pompous declarations of national greatness with introspection and the studied assessment of India's first 50 years of Independence.¹

The Constitution's framers intended the President to be the polity's conscience, rather than the cipher successive P.M.s have sought to reduce him to. In the 1990s, with political games becoming increasingly dubious, the President was called upon to be a third umpire, not a mute spectator. His actions largely fell in the category of "discretion, advice and suggestion" as mentioned by Mr. M. C. Setalvad or "opportunity for influencing decisions", which Dr. Rajendra Prasad was keen the President should have. Too many people, evidently, confused the role of the President in a modern democratic India, including President themselves, with that of either ceremonial Monarch or an active executive. New contour of the Presidential authority is in the transitional process. Till, that gets amply redefined, the office will remain engage in what Venkataraman calls "constitutional conundrums".

(III) PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET: CO-ORDINATOR BUT NO 'PRIMUS INTER PARES' OF 'PERPLEXING COMPLEXITY' BEREFT COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

It is perhaps no exaggeration that if in 1990s our collective capacity to handle the crisis of governance declined critically, it is due to a marked downside in the institutional vibrancy of the office of Prime Minister (P.M.), and the cabinet system. Ironically, the cabinet system, which not only embodies the principle of representative government accountable to peoples' representatives in Parliament, but also the principle of coalition

1. *Frontline*, (September 11, 1998), pp. 132-134.

as well, in terms of its historical evolution,¹ became a brooding causality of coalition politics. Pathological symptoms appeared in the locus of the collective responsibility principle. The cabinet speaking in many voices. The sense of direction and unity of purpose, very essential for the proper functioning of a cabinet, got lost in the coalition quagmire. Leaks to newspapers of positions taken by the constituent partners on various issues in the cabinet becoming almost a routine occurrence, with the ministers under pressure from their rank and file anxious to show that they have not sold out to, and not hoodwinked by, their partners, and when the government in trouble, the enormous temptation to make scapegoats of other partners, especially with elections in vicinity. Germane to this, the P.M. was found under perpetual pressure from even the smallest fringe-party in the coalition, unable to select his own team, and even reshuffle the cabinet at his own will. Profoundly affected by the need to secure inter-party consensus, power shifting from the 'cabinet' to an extra-constitutional authority, like the co-ordination or steering body.

1. The evolution of the Cabinet and its practices, during the 18th century England was a sort of an anti-monarch alliance drawing sanctions from the Parliament. It was meant to beat the practice of the King meeting and doing business with his ministers one by one in his closet. John P. Mackintosh: *The Government and Politics of Britain*, (Hutchinson & Co., London, Third Rev. Ed., 1974), p. 57. The evolution of the Cabinet system in India reflects building of a similar alliance. Even though the Interim Government formed in 1946 under Nehru's leadership, following intense negotiations on the proposal of the Cabinet Mission Plan, was not Cabinet in strict sense of the term—it was Viceroy's Executive Council—Nehru treated the Council to be the Cabinet and in his letter to Viceroy Lord Wavell on 1 September 1946, his assertion that "This Government will function as a cabinet and will be jointly responsible for its decision" was an indication of his desire to create and maintain a solid alliance against the British before the transfer of power. Obviously, Nehru's effort to give the Interim Government the status of a Cabinet succeeded. Ajay K. Mehra and V.A. Pai Panandikar: *The Indian Cabinet: A Study in Governance* (Kornark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996), p. 79.

Since 1989, all non-Congress governments have strained the PMs who had to carry with them political leaders and ideologies of different and some incompatible hues. Over the decade, the normative component of decision process by political actor through consensus was perceived to be compromised by the manipulative component of coalition politics, continually exercising influence depending on their personal calibre, the extent of their political support base, and the extent of popular support they bring to the party in power. "The august office of the PM as the most powerful centre in the system of concentric power circles from the large-stone of electorate, Parliament, majority-party, Council of Ministers, and cabinet got weakened at a time when the PM was called to manage the most difficult period of policy drift, social turmoil, development and challenge of change".¹

Mr. V. P. Singh started on a promising note; he earned the title of lachrymose 'Master of Compromise', for his ability to line up support for his government from both ends of the political spectrum. His natural inclination was to rise above factionalism, but he was besieged by ambitious colleagues and die-hard parties, whose conspiracies and intrigues to nudge him out of office tempered his style of governance. The contrary traits of his personality, exacerbated by situational imperatives, made him earnest and machiavellian, decisive and ambivalent, consistent and inconsistent at one and the same time.¹ This was reflected in some of his policy decisions. In January, 1990 the Centre dismissed all state governors to ensure 'valve-based' politics and those presiding over state-level political system. It then began searching for pro Janata party hacks to fill these positions. In

1. James Manor: *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1994), op. cit., p.16 .

October, the government suspended the Congress state government of Karnataka, but later retracted under pressure from Mr. Rajiv Gandhi.² The P.M. discovered the virtues of Mandalised social justice when his position was threatened by Mr. Devi Lal, stood firm on it, only to ensue political controversy that doomed his government. The cabinet leadership in fact was so fractured that Mr. Om Prakash Chautala, the Tau's son almost brought down the central government in his several disgraceful bids to crown himself as the chief minister of Haryana.³

Of course in the given circumstances, Mr. V.P. Singh's margin of policy formulation was narrow. His prime task was, and should have been, to keep his heterogeneous flock, including his BJP and CPM supporters together through regular consultation, also involvement and above all, adoption of policies, that did not encourage polarisation even among the JD-NF and its BJP-CPM allies. And yet, the limitations of his minority government did not deter him from attempting to overhaul overnight India's social order. Whether it was his decision to partially implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations or his move to dramatically raise the ante over the Ayodhya issue after playing footsie with the antagonistic forces, the impression he created was that he lacked both vision and staying power. Of course, he sought to make out that he had always been a conviction, not a consensual politician, that promoting social reforms and equity had always been his

1. See *Times of India* 13 March, 1990, for an excellent editorial on V.P. Singh. Also, D. Sinha: "V.P. Singh, Chandrashekhar, and 'Nowhere' Politics in India" *Asian Survey* (July 1991), pp. 598-612.

2. *India Today*, 31 October, 1990.

3. He became the C.M. of Haryana in December, 1989. Charged with rigging his election, he was replaced by Banarsi Das Gupta in May 1990. On July 12, he was back in the drivers seat. Within five days, however, he was forced to quit but not without installing his factotum, Hukum Singh, as the C.M. of the state. The Tau rocked the central government in pursuit of his dynastic ambition. See *India Today*, 31 March; 15, 31 August, 1990. The *Hindustan Times*, 15 July, 1990, lists the countdown to the crisis.

foremost preoccupation. But the way and times in which he acted on the issues of *Rath Yatra* and Mandal, he was seen in effect to have initiated these actions for both immediate tactical gains as well as to fulfil a larger strategic goal.

On Mandal, for instance, the attempt was to preempt Mr. Devi Lal's Boat Club rally and on Ayodhya to test how far can Mr. Advani go before snapping the umbilical cord of anti-Congressism that attached the BJP to the NF Government. In both cases, however, the strategic design was something else, to expand his own power base among the OBCs and the Muslims, the better to either capture the Congress or to destroy it altogether. But when Singh through expediently motivated blundering and an uncontrollable urge to acquire his own social base, found himself on a confrontationist path, the result was his own marginalisation and the weakening of the P.M. office without strengthening cabinet.

Mr. Chandrashekhar, a master in backdoor politics, was a proverbial example of the tail wagging the dog. As one of Congress (I) general secretary boasted: 'Now it is up to us. We call the shots.'¹ And he was right Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had become the de-facto P.M. of the country. Non-descript P.M., by trying to prefer a less confrontationist approach than his predecessor, and romanticise the people in some populist way endeavoured 'to legitimise the concept of a minority government. "A man without a mandate", he was perhaps the most effective in his adoption of a discoursing style, with the Parliament about major problems like negotiations between Hindu and Muslim leaders on the Ayodhya entangle. But for all practical purpose, he was a stopgap P.M. of a 'puppet regime', (as was exemplified his parting gift to Mr. Rajiv, around the time of his resignation. Though worried about the manoeuvres of the Congress (I) to split his

1. *India Today*, 30 November, 1990, p. 17

party, he dissolved the Pondicherry Assembly, and brought Haryana under Presidential rule, as if continuum of the cases of Assam and Tamil Nadu), and therefore had nothing to contribute to development or decay of the institution.

In both these regimes there was some decline in the unchecked authoritarian position of P.M., but that does not mean that the office of P.M. became less important. In fact Mr. V.P. Singh sought to make out that he had always been a conviction not a consensual politician, and in that he did try to prove the superior position of P.M. vis-a-vis ministerial colleagues. He in fact behaved from the beginning as P.M. of a single majority party, not a of a complex coalition that demanded constant nursing. Undoubtedly, during NF government, cabinet ministers were indeed more autonomous than at any time since the early years of Mrs. Gandhi's Prime Ministership. The cabinet met frequently and discussions were open, candid and often prolonged, but however, Singh ruled more by a small coterie of mainly Jan Morcha advisors. He did not create an institutionalised mechanism to coordinate the views and perspectives of the three allied parties; the consultations that took place were mostly of an informal nature and often bilateral, between the ruling leadership and one or the other of its two political allies. Simultaneously, the cabinet did not speak a coherent coagulated political language. Ministers behaved as if they were apolitically exalted and often-incompetent executives or bureaucrats-the government as a whole was unable to communicate to the people vision and image of alternative policies. Because due to each's sufficient party strength on the one side and vision an the other, the P.M. and cabinet were divested of staying power.

The Congress-I minority government under P.M., Mr. Narasimha Rao, started on reassuring note. The cabinet ventured into far reaching economic reforms, checkmated the politics of Mandal and Mandir, and restored the democratic process in Punjab, and its leader, P.M. was praised for his cautious, low-key, serene and consensus-building approach to politics. In the mould of the Chanakya image, he continued this consensual style so long as he headed a minority government. The great virtue held on behalf of Rao in his early years was that he didn't have long-term political ambition, that he recognised that he was P.M. out of an accident of history and that he thus wanted to simply do what was required in the five years allotted to him. But after unethically managing to get a majority in July, 1994, he began to avoid Parliament and earned the sobriquet of "an absentee P.M.", and studiously avoided discussion in the House. Also the interests of the Congress and increasing inconvenience in dealing with some opposition leaders from the Right to the Left, as well as the tendency of Rao not to share his Government's US-centric information of pressure on India's strategic concerns like the NPT and the missiles programme contributed to this end.

Mr. Rao was too preoccupied in maintaining his perch, and bought support and building legitimate and not so legitimate coalitions to maintain his leadership.¹ His brand of politics embraced a model that was at once opportunistic and neglectful of real national interest, marked by his habitual slide into forte of withdrawal and inaction, pretending that nothing of consequence has happened. He established a stranglehold over the government with a vengeance. Following Mr. Arjun Singh's

1. In particular, see Charu Lal Joshi 'A Lengthening List of Worries', *India Today*, 11 August, 1996; Rajni Kothari, 'Rao's Darkest Hour', *India Today*, 30 April, 1996.

resignation from the government in 1995, the Cabinet Committee of Political Affairs (CCPA)—consisting of P.M., home Minister, finance minister and Defence minister—ceased to function. The CCPA is the policy making politburo of the government. Rao also kept all-powerful Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) with himself appointing his personal secretary A.N. Verma, as its chairman. For three years he retained the key portfolios of industry, foreign affairs and defence before farming them out.

Prior to this, in 1991, when the Babri-Masjid issue was hourly hotting up, the cabinet did not seem to have got an opportunity to discuss the problem in its various aspects till the tragic flash-point. However, the P.M. evidently discussed the matter with others the details of which were not made available either to the Council of Ministers or even to his senior colleagues like Mr. Arjun Singh. This was an issue that Mr. Arjun Singh raised in his letter that eventually led to his easing out from the cabinet. Thus, not only collective responsibility but also the transparency of policy formulations and implementations were cheerfully sacrificed in this highly personalised functioning of the government.

Again, the purpose of the expansion of the cabinet by a fairly massive induction of 12 new Ministers of State and the elevation of three them to the cabinet rank at the fag end of his term in October, 1995, by a P.M. who from the beginning was always dithering on the edge of expansion and was very niggardly in the matter of induction of new members, was not meant to enhance the image of the government or increase its administrative efficiency; Rao was clearing the decks for the coming Lok Sabha elections and sending signals to various quarters. That high profile Mr. Rajesh Pilot was divested of his Home Portfolio (Internal Security), and the plum I & B Ministry

was given to Mr. P.A. Sangma (who was then of cabinet rank) speak of the motives of the P.M. in this boldly cynical exercise.

Moreover, these additions and deletions in the Council of Ministers mattered little as major decisions from a long time are being taken in the Prime Minister's office (PMO). For record's sake they are placed before the Cabinet and are formally endorsed. The startling revelation by Mr. Arjun Singh that the J&K problem was not discussed even once by the cabinet in the last four years meant the death of the cabinet system, and the collective responsibility which is an integral feature of it. The far reaching economic reforms also did not seem to be the outcome of the collective wisdom of the cabinet. The Finance Ministry under Dr. Manmohan Singh functioned in a fully autonomous manner getting the mandate and legitimacy for its decisions neither from the will of the people nor from Parliament nor even from the Council of Ministers.

This is against the letter and spirit of the Cabinet system P.M. Mrs. Indira Gandhi in her hey-day of political power introduced this style of functioning to which even the stalwarts in the government meekly acquiesced in.¹ One advantage of this is that even a senior party leader who is *persona non-grata* to the P.M. and is taken in the cabinet due to political compulsions, can be kept in the dark on policy matters, and made utterly ineffective. Allocation of portfolios is the prerogative of the P.M., and the first step in cutting a political rival to size is to put him

1. By making her PMO 'annexe' Intelligence services, the natural constituents of the Ministry of Home Affairs and such other changes, Mrs. Gandhi converted the cabinet government into an Prime Ministerial government. PMO as an independent and virtually parallel executive encroaches and usurps the power and functions of individual ministries and the cabinet. It gathers information, gives advice, initiate policies—even economic and foreign policies—oversees their implementation, and takes a hand in deciding appointments and promotions of high administrative officials. The domineering role of PMO has continued till today's BJP-led government.

in charge of an unimportant ministry. This is in a way a legitimate political game of the West-minister model of democracy. But to scuttle the whole principle of the cabinet system of governance, as P.M. Rao did, in order to make the political rivals ineffective is politically immoral.

With the decline of the importance of the Council of Ministers, the power of the PM's office steadily increased, in Mr. Rao's tenure. During the days of Mrs. Gandhi, it is said, a junior officer in the PMO had more political clout than a cabinet minister. This system, perfected by her, Mr. Rao inherited, made easier for a wily P.M. to exercise his authority in an unfettered manner even if his hold on party or on the Parliamentary party remained shaky. Members of the Council of Ministers, without any share in decision-making, they were set new task, explicitly, in form of highly paid politically powerful propagandists of the government—explaining to the people the benefits they have derived and the more in the coming years from the ongoing economic reforms, as well as tacitly, to fight with added political vigour the rivals of the P.M. in State Governments and the party organisation. The cabinet ministers, owing their office to the P.M.'s pleasure, accepted this position, expressing their dissent at the most on some minor issues. However, on the whole Mr. Rao's regime lacked in even the effective role and dynamism that PMO evinced during the preceding dynastic regimes of the Congress, as underlined by the fact that Mr. Rao's writ did not run as authoritatively as that of the previous Congress PMs, and although Congress dissidents continued to seek his blessings before they initiated a revolt against an incumbent CM, Mr. Rao rarely made or unmade CMs in the style of Mrs. Gandhi. Until such time that he was able to manufacture a majority support, he lived with uneasy Congress C.M.— Mr. N. Janardhana Reddy

of Andhra Pradesh, and Mr. S. Bangarappa of Karnataka (1992) made no bones about their rebellion against the P.M.¹ Rajni Kothari summed up Mr. Rao's character as P.M.: he was 'stewed in his own cocktail of ego, loneliness, indecisiveness, and a ruthless pursuit of personal ambition';² who unintentionally connived in the dismantling of P.M.'s executive power by trying to put all "blame" for the indictment of senior politicians in the Hawala case on the Supreme Court, and saying that he as the head of the executive had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Rao proved totally unwilling and unable to assert the power of his office to defend one of the basic constitutional postulates: a secular order. And though his reign continued till May 1996, he never recovered the authority of the P.M. As he retreated into the safety of the nice house on Race Course Road, the judiciary began encroaching up on the areas that legitimately belonged to the executive. From Supreme Court judges to metropolitan magistrates, there was a gradual nibbling away at the chief political executives authority; this institutional erosion had its own political consequences, inviting challenges to the PM's primacy in the realm of *realpolitik*.

There was hardly any reversal of prime ministerial dominance over the cabinet under the much weaker political personalities that came to occupy the P.M.'s chair in the U.F. coalition governments, as they seemed to have lost even the glimpses of central and decisive role as displayed some times in schemer Rao's period. The disparate partners of the coalition, and the supporters like the CPM, and the Congress, 'decentred' the system's once powerful PMO. Bereft of charisma, without a

1. *India Today*, 15 October, 1992: *The Statesman Weekly*, 5 September, 17 October, 14 November, 1992.

2. R. Kothari: "Rao's Darkest Hours", op. cit., p.25.

strong organisational support, and political base in the Lok Sabha, they could not function as the crucial operators of the government, and the coalition of which they had been contextual product.

Mr. Deve Gowda was the PM with a regional vision, and regional interest, who could not grow beyond his Karnataka mindset. Obsessed with Karnataka politics, he imported senior officials from his home state in PMO. Politically, the P.M. was, to use the lexicon of cricket, on a cricket of unpredictable bounce. He neither had the full measure of Indian politics, and the Central Government, nor of his political allies, and cabinet colleagues. As the compromise leader of the motley crew, he did not enjoy the usual Prime Ministerial freedom to select his own cabinet, as he not only had to accommodate the nominees of other coalition partners, but also the preferences of the regional satraps within his own party. In fact, Indian politics took a historic turn, when the P.M. himself was appointed by these opposition ruled state CMs, in variation to earlier era, when Congress PMs used to appoint their state CMs. Not surprisingly, he had to face embarrassment over Mr. Taslimuddin and Mrs. Kanti Singh episode. His Defence Minister Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's statements too had been a source of discomfort to the P.M.

As the P.M., the politics of survival in office allowed him no more than a tightrope walk. In addition to coping with the Congress manoeuvres, and Left pressures, he has to protect his tribe of supporters (including the charge-sheeted Congressman) against the 'law taking its own course' in corruption cases. He was suspected of pulling some strings to help out Mr. Narasimha Rao. When he, again, rushed to bail out the Bihar CM, and the JD President, in the multi-crore fodder scam, media cried foul.

The statesman weekly editorialised: "The "humble farmer" may have a great deal to be humble about, but he has nothing to learn as regards misuse of power to protect the guilty.¹ Mr. Gowda was caught in a prisoner's dilemma: he was damned if he tinkered with the rule of law, and he was damned if he didn't.

True, the Mr. Gowda government developed a Common Minimum Programme (CMP), which was based not only on the election manifestoes of the coalition partners, but also incorporated the political agenda of those parties, which were supporting from the outside. But CMP was only a broad statement of approaches to dealing with India's various problems and the consensus on it was a suspect when the UF came to the nitty-gritty of policy formulation, particularly on economic policy. The Congress, and the Left issued contradictory statements in this reference, and did not leave a single opportunity to make its disagreements, and discomforts public over various issues.²

His cabinet ministers being nominees of the coalition partners cared less for him, and more for the party bosses, and party interests, that proved to be a handicap in taking quick decisions in emergent situation, leading him into taking a wholly unconstitutional position in U.P. and into a near paralysis on economic reforms. The wages of poor inter-party co-ordination created confusion of policy front, erosion of collective responsibility of the cabinet with ministers working and speaking at cross-purposes, and finally the collapse of the government itself. Too much reliance had been placed on the PM for

1. *The Statesman Weekly*, editorial 4 January, 1997.

2. The *faux pas* of Deve Gowda in meeting the Shiva Sena Chief, Thackeray at the dinner with Amitabh Bachchan had came in for sharp criticism from leaders of his own party. But the most interesting was the observation made by the Congress-I President, Rao, who issued a threat to him and his government, warning that the UF would not be allowed to stray from the path of his party's policies. *Mainstream*, September 21, 1996.

co-ordination of what was undoubtedly a fragile combination of 13-odd parties, which he found next to impossible, being overburdened with his own ministerial responsibilities and also handicapped by the tendency of empire-building by the major constituent parties and their leaders. One heartening experience of the Gowda government was that it had fallen relatively less due to unbridled individual ambitions, and more for policy differences and poor inter-party co-ordination, although the expulsion of Mr. R.K. Hegde and Mrs. Maneka Gandhi from the party showed that there were still contentious issues left within the party.

The PM's status was further pushed into the process of devaluation during Mr. Gujral's regime. A widely travelled, well-informed, and experienced man, but not being a leader of his own base, he remained prisoner of stitch and patch coalition depending on state-satrap. He was crowned leader of the UF less through a process of aggregation of consent, than through one of elimination. The key to his nomination (a more appropriate word than election) had more to do with the weakness of the strong, i.e., major UF contenders for the PMs post, than with the strength of the weak (Gujral himself). Mr. Gujral was temperamentally inclined to be cautious, status-quoist and conservative, and took the path of least resistance, i.e. trying to conduct politics in "the old way", disturbing existing arrangements only minimally. There lied the rub. The fact that the UF was a rather fissile, post-election, crisis-prone coalition meant precisely, that it cannot be carried on in "the old way." Gujral thus discovered himself in a politically anomalous situation.

A two-men apex committee consisting of the P.M. and the Congress President, was formed to facilitate the relationship between the UF, and its legislative coalition-partner the Congress. Besides, Gujral had to contend with a larger co-ordination committee with the Congress, in addition, of course, to the steering committee of the UF comprising the parties in the cabinet plus CPI (M). It seemed that he had to function in a model of politics where the PM does not exercise a dominant influence, and is more of a facilitator, at the same time ensuring the steering committee avoid being a super-cabinet. His principle task was not so much to build a close relationship with the Congress, and provide a durable government, dependent on it, as to forge a proper, principled, stable coalition out of what then was a proto-coalition.

However, P.M. Mr. Gujral dithered over three vital issues—the women's reservation bill, the oil-pool deficit, and the fodder scam. His rationale for inaction was a preference for consensus, which was an excuse for non-governance. The premier, base or no base, has a certain primacy. He did not exercise it and was ineffectual, and indecisive, certainly not the first among the equals. The PM's institution was demeaned and degraded openly. On the last day of the Budget session in Lok Sabha, in June 1997, he standing for 30 minutes, tried vainly to introduce the Women's Reservation Bill in face of trenchant opposition behaving horrifically wrong and vulgar. The stalwarts like Opposition leader Mr. Vajpayee and former P.M. Mr. Chandrashekhhar did not utter a word in protest. Both were up on their feet to pounce upon a hapless officer appointed in the Ministry of External affairs and even dug out a 23 year old letter, quoting certain sentences out of context to run him down. They, who claimed to be supporting causes cutting across party lines,

were just mum, adding insult to injury through their silence. In October, again, the bullying tactics of the Congress in the 72-hour battle for U.P. could have been outdone only by the abject supine-ness of the UF, by having stood it ground and thwarting Congress President Mr. Sita Ram Kesari, in face the threat to withdraw support- its lone if overused ace. Instead Mr. Gujral, and his ministers capitulated at the very outset as they recommended promulgation of President's rule, nor was the cabinet unanimous in its desire to sack Mr. Kalyan Singh, the proposal having been resisted from he beginning by Home Minister Mr. Indrajit Gupta, who though a veteran communist, was expected to bay for the blood of the BJP, he opposed the move on legal, ethical and strategic grounds. Its import eluded the P.M. On the other hand, he surrendered to a gaggle of opportunity seekers, led by Defence Minister.

On assuming office in April, P.M. Mr. Gujral offered the hope of putting at least some element of governance into a rainbow coalition at odds with itself. But, he belied that hope by acting wimpishly under all sorts of pressure- be it leftist blackmail over economic policies (as demonstrated by the slinging match between Minister for Agriculture Mr. Chaturanan Mishra and Finance Minister Mr. P. Chidambaram), or the Congress cowboy technique of negotiation. True, he remained loyal to his inner core taking the path of least resistance like a gentleman-one who does not embarrass you nor does inflict pain on you- even if it spelt a very tragic failure professionally.

It was the yearning among the corporate sector, the middle, and the salaried classes for a reasonable cohesiveness in our governing arrangement that underwrote the birth of the Vajpayee regime in March 1998. The expectation was the new P.M. would preside over the government as its chief political

executive. But instead of understanding and exploring the potential of his office, he made a virtue of political fractiousness that was built in the coalition. He also rendered himself vulnerable to the same kinds of mix of subversion and blackmail from within, that eventually led to the set of events that eliminated in the downfall of his government in April, 1999. It was an irony of the constitutional kind that only after being voted out of office did he come anywhere near acting as the chief political executive, especially in the conduct of the Kargil War.

From the manner in which the P.M. handled the rising prices of essential commodities, especially onion, to sudden change of leadership of the Delhi Government as a sop to the Khurana faction of the State BJP, the government testified that art of governance was beyond its reach, something its critics have had all along maintained while genuine stability was a far cry since time and again the government, particularly the P.M. was easily held to ransom by the maverick AIADMK *supremo* Ms. Jayalalita, always trying to extract her pound of flesh in return for continued extension of support, her demands gradually increasing from the greater induction of Ministers from her party in the Union Council of Ministers to divesting Mr. V. Ramamurthy (of the TMC) of the Petroleum portfolio (insisting to be given to her trusted lieutenants), and finally, the dismissal of the DMK state government in Tamil Nadu, vaging her personal vendetta.

The mishandling of the Bihar situation by the cabinet snowballed into a major crisis for the government involving the BJP and Samata Party, and the utter incapacity to govern was best exposed by the final outcome of the Bezbaruah episode. But the most disquieting episode of the P.M. in this innings was the sacking of a serving chief of the armed forces. That the situation

was allowed to reach such a pass that there was no option but dismiss him unceremoniously, did not reflect at all well on his Prime Ministerial leadership. Out of narrow political and debilitating calculations, the PM was simply unwilling to assert the authority of his office over a cabinet colleague; in the process he ended up countenancing a procedural ugliness and injecting politicisation and bitterness in the civilian–army relationship, which could be discerned more than once during and after the Kargil war.

In his second innings as the P.M., Mr. Vajpayee appears to be nursing back to reasonably good health the authority and prestige of the office of P.M. It is not suddenly that he has metamorphosed from an amiable non-performer into superb administrator. Nothing of the kind has happened; septuagenarians do not easily turn a new leaf at that age. Yet a new lightness is discernible in his steps, and there is suggestion of assertiveness in the exercise of the authority latent in his office. No other development underscores this assumption of the leadership role than his unwavering advocacy, inside and outside the Government, of the new economic policies of reducing subsidies. He has been willing to stay on the course, steel up the resolve of his own finance minister, face down the demands of allies and the opposition to roll back these “anti-people” policies, and lastly, has spoken up in defence of these harsh and tough decisions from public podiums.

Today, he is the beneficiary of a change in a number of crucial equations. First, Vajpayee has recovered the leadership of his own cabinet, in sharp contrast to the 1998–99 period. Mr. George Fernandes is no more the prima donna that he was the first time out, Mr. Advani pretends to be more than number two, but has come to terms with the limits of his own political

savvy and with the extent of prime ministerial authority; Mr. Jaswant Singh has to depend upon Mr. Vajpayee's countenance and indulgence for all his foreign policy initiatives and so-called doctrines; and poor Mr. Yashwant Sinha seeks prime ministerial protection as he gets a bitter taste of the medicine called the "Public Interest Litigation", a medicine that his party colleagues have so insistently administered to Mr. Laloo Yadav. And, both Mr. Jethmalani and Mr. Sharad Yadav have reason to be thankful to the PM that they have not been stripped of their respective ministerial portfolios.

A corollary of the above is that the PMO has regained, to a very large extent, the initiative over power, policy and patronage. The Cabinet Secretary has cheerfully surrendered the initiative to Mr. Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the PM, the Foreign Secretary finds it expedient and helpful to keep Mr. Mishra in the loop. Various secretaries have discovered for themselves the usefulness of seeking the PMO's help in pushing their Ministries' projects and policies in the cabinet¹. It need to be noted that Mr. Vajpayee has not yet felt the need to have a Minister of State (*a la* Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi during the Rao era) to help him in running the PMO, nor has he been tempted to replicate the disastrous experiment of having a political secretary. The centrality of the PMO is best attested to by the "peace initiative" in Kashmir.

Second, Mr. Vajpayee has redefined— to his advantage the relationship with the BJP . The new equation of new party president has been postponed by a month just because he is preoccupied elsewhere. As luck would have it, he is free to

1. The decline in the role of cabinet is because of the growing centralisation of power in both government and party in the hands of the PM, which in turn is due to the reliance of the ruling parties on him for winning election.

indicate his preference between the lacklustre Mr. Thakre, the thoroughly uninspiring Mr. Krishnamurthy and the ambitious but remarkably amenable, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu. None of these three gentlemen or any other thoroughbred from the Sangh Parivar stable can hope to restore the organisation's upper hand. Like on many other counts, the BJP has been made to see the correctness of the Nehruvian postulate that the party organisation cannot be allowed to meddle in the Government's choice of policies and personnel. There is no more any misplaced talk of "co-ordination" penals. In the recent cabinet expansion/reshuffle the BJP aspirants have been left to lick their wounds.

A corollary of this changed equation is that the RSS establishment too can no longer pretend to dictate to the Government . This means that disgruntled elements such as Mr. Madan Lal Khurana would not be entertained with any sympathy should they choose to cross swords with the PM. The new RSS chief and his team appear to have come terms with their ignorance and irrelevance.

Thirdly, Mr. Vajpayee can now be deemed to have upper hand *vis-a-vis* the allies in and out of the NDA. Admittedly the allies are not totally without their clout. Mr. Chandrababu Naidu can have the satisfaction of publicly rebuffing the PM's offer of joining his cabinet. Mr. Naveen Patnaik exercised his prerogative to appoint men of his choice in the Vajpayee Government. Mr. Nitish Kumar's claim could not be ignored with the same impunity as Sushri Uma Bharati's. Yet Mr. Vajpayee and his advisers can and do draw strength from the nature of the 1999 electoral contest in which Mr. Vajpayee's all-India acceptability gave the straggling alliance a reasonable coherence. For example,

there is precious little that S. Ramadoss can do about his unhappiness over shifting his nominee in the Union Cabinet from the Health Ministry to Ministry of Coal.

A corollary of this new equation is that the PM becomes an accepted umpire among the allies and the BJP.¹ The BJP-Trinmull rift over sharing of seats was resolved only after the PM sent his emissary. The new equation was best reflected in the deft manner in which the Tamil Nadu C.M. Karunanidhi, was brought around in the matter of intervention/non-intervention in the Sri Lankan imbroglio; there was also a confidence that the PMO had a correct and more realistic assessment of the sentiments in Tamil Nadu than some of the Tamil political parties.

Fourthly and the lastly, the PM is fortunate enough in the kind of opposition he faces in and out of Parliament. Fortuitously enough, the main opposition party, the Congress (I), is distracted inwardly; and, as the leader of opposition, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi is the best thing that could have happened to Mr. Vajpayee. On their own, the other in opposition are handicapped in making life difficult for the PM. The inevitable corollary of this enfeebled opposition is that PM. does not have to depend upon the partisan support of the BJP or the NDA allies; instead, he is able to

1. However, the Ramakrishna Hegde episode has indicated that the lessons from the P.M. previous experience have yet to be fully instilled inside. Hegde has been Vajpayee's senior cabinet colleague and was a source of political respectability and moderation for much of 1998-99 period; yet the PM chose to treat him as George Fernandes vassal. The whole idea of asking Fernandes to decide who would be the JD (U) nominees in the Cabinet may have been politically clever ploy; but it immediately betrayed a lack of self-confidence in the PM's authority. If this deference to Fernandes was bad enough, there are reports that Vajpayee found himself constrained to accommodate the preferences of the RSS brass in the matter of the membership of the Council of Ministers.

garner the requisite parliamentary numbers for the "harsh, hard" economic measures from all sides. This absence of unrelenting opposition enables the PM to blunt the partisan demands of the hawks within the BJP/NDA; inversely the Opposition parties' inability to stampede the Government into decisions against its preferences give the PM just the confidence to deal with the opposition CMs in the spirit of "live and let live." For example, Vajpayee is most unlikely now to give in to the demands such as the invocation of Article 356 against the RJD rule in Bihar.

Mercifully, Mr. Vajpayee has acquired only a the bare minimum control over institutional authority vested in his office. He has not become an insufferable overlord who can ignore the constitutional parameters of his authority; he is not even in a position to roll back the encroachments the judiciary and Rashtrapati Bhavan have made of prime ministerial authority. But he has used his acceptability to retrieve just enough power to lend audibility and efficacy to the governing arrangement at the Centre.

In the days to come, Mr. Vajpayee would be watched closely by other centres of authority – judiciary, CMs, the bureaucracy, the President, Governors, etc. to see as to what extent he is willing to be source of moderation and statesmanship, without allowing the Jethmalanis and Fernandeses to overwhelm his government. The institutional recuperation of the PM office, even if partial and still tentative, could be crucial to restoring the constitutional equilibrium that must sustain the political order, at a time when the Indian State is being tested by a host of inimical forces, both internal and external.

**(IV) PARLIAMENT AND STATE ASSEMBLIES : GROWING
MALFUNCTIONING/DEVALUATION OF POPULAR
SOVEREIGNTY**

Parliament has been described as “the Grand Inquest of the Nation”,¹ and next to elections and civil liberties, the body occupies a pivotal position in a parliamentary democracy. In India, the Parliament and State legislatures not only legitimise a government, but they are also the supreme organs for formulation of policies, overseeing their implementation, and in general acting as “watchdogs” over the functioning of the government.

In 1990s as the parties fragmented and regional parties proliferated, elections became increasingly vitiated by coarse populism and politics of base passions, accelerated by political forces, parliamentary life deteriorated in Delhi and even more so in the state capitals. Legislature neither acted as a decision-making body (members of the ruling party’s parliamentary committees played no role in deciding issues and policies), nor a debating body worth the large resources spent on it, nor indeed an institution capable of rising above narrow partisan and factional loyalties to grapple with issues of national concern. A political commentator appropriately calls it a “toothless giant”.²

Ruling coalition/minority government, moreover, have started looking towards the Parliament as a body for legitimisation of personal and sectarian powers, as coalition arrangement is perceived by the ruling partners to be a ‘stop-gap’ and second best option. A major role in that has been played by a type of leaders who desire to remain in power by all

1. Subhash C. Kashyap : *Parliament in the Indian Polity* (New Delhi, Manager, Govt. of India Press, 1987), p. 3, op. cit.

2. Satyabrata Ray Choudhury, “Toothless Giant: Plight of Indian Legislature”, *The Statesman*, February 27, 1994.

means. And opposition has found it much more difficult to challenge governments' policy agenda and to mount credible alternative. As Rudolph and Rudolph put it, "Parliamentary leaders, have fled from the crises of the legislature in India rather than come to grips with it".¹ In operational sense, the parliamentary model stands on the basic principles of correlation between executive and legislature, latter being responsible to the former for its acts and omissions. But today it is rampantly misused on the basis of petty power game, made subservient to the supreme leader's wishes. Cabinet dictatorship (which is still strong today) and bureaucratic administration, and enjoyment of the parliamentary privileges and prerogatives by the individual legislators have not only corroded the popular representative legitimacy, but has created a sense of scepticism and cynicism in the mind of the masses. In this context of parliamentary operationalisation, a very senior parliamentarian Hiren Mukherji argues that Parliament is a "talking shop with 600 talking asses".²

In the coalition culture of dubious variety, defections from the political parties have been accomplished on mega scale. The Anti-Defection Law has failed to be strict and unequivocally bar this opportunistic behaviour, it being legally defective, its provisions being partisanly interpreted by bias presiding officers.³ For whatever party happened to be in power, it has endeavoured to utilise the existing infirm law's loopholes to buy MPs from opposition parties. The peculiarities of the Tenth Schedule has been used to allow a faction of the JD in

1. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanna H. Rudolph: *In Pursuit of Lakshmi : The Political Economy of the India State* (Orient Longman, 1987); op. cit. p. 95-98.

2. Hiren Mukherji: *Portrait of Parliament* (Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1992), op. cit., p. 32.

3. Prashant Bhushan: "Are Amendments Required in the Anti-Defection Act?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, (November 22, 1997), pp. 2987-2988.

Parliament to be counted as a separate party as a result of a split. This new party, the Socialist Janata Party (SJP) led by Mr. Chandrashekhar, was asked by the President to form a government after Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, as the leader of the largest opposition party, pledged his support to the new government. The Anti-Defection Act, then, to some extent was at least responsible for entrusting governance of the Republic to a party that had only a minuscule presence in the Lok Sabha. Again, the Speaker's decision based on the Act enabled the minority government of Mr. Narasimha Rao to defeat a motion of no confidence against it moved by the combined opposition in November 1993. Such examples are numerous.

The point here is that the position of ruling party in the Parliament is fluid under coalition. Despite the final agreement on a common programme, there has been continuing threat of defection, and some ally failing to support the government. On the other, there has been an equal readiness on the part of certain groups in the opposition to side with government in securing the passage of a bill. In fact the coalition/minority government in the wake of split within its own ranks encourages defection in the ranks of opposition to secure success on a particular issue and save the government from toppling. Moreover, there were continuing intrigues and plans to subvert the existing alliance and to replace it by a different combination. Members of the ruling coalition have joined such intrigues as much as the opposition groups. The opposition itself has been a loose assemblage of groups wedded to different doctrines and political programmes; with their chances of ever discharging the duties of a constructive and competitive organisation capable of providing an alternative absolutely remote. The confusion it has exhibited in its conduct was far worse than the loose ruling alignment. On the other hand, there have been factions and opposition groups even within individual ruling parties, which

have posed a danger, as they have always threatened to crossover if their point is not accommodated on a particular issue. Even when compromise has been arrived at, the constituent parties did insist on defending their own stand and retaining the freedom of criticising the compromise as either being too radical or too mild, and shifting the responsibility for unpopular acts to the other parties. In such precarious situation, it has been always difficult to determine clearly where ruling benches end and opposition starts. Hence, ironically, though the legislative chambers have come to exercise real power and control the executive in real sense, making separation of powers more effective in comparison to two-party system as a single vote of confidence may be sufficient to dislodge the government, but unethical mode of "interpolation technique of defection and parliamentary misdemeanour renders it null and void."¹

A review of the Budget session of the Lok Sabha (1995) gives us insight into the falling standards of parliamentary performance. The lightening speed with which financial business was transacted without affording an opportunity for a thorough discussion of matters under consideration made a mockery parliamentary scrutiny. For two days no important work could be transacted because the Opposition stalled the proceeding on the issue of imposition of President's rule in Bihar. Session after sessions, the proceedings were marked as even more "unprecedented, acrimonious and noisy."² Even the Speakers or Chairpersons were not spared by the new set of MPs. Dr. Sharma, the Chairman of Rajya Sabha was so exasperated with the unruly goings on the floor of the House, that he implored the

1. Prahladrai L. Avasthi: "Anti-Detection Law: Mockery of Democracy", *Politics India*, (April 1998), pp. 32-33.

2. Subhash C. Kashyap: "Half-a-century of opposition in Parliament: Its Changing Face, Role and Functions (1947-1997)", *Politics India*, (October, 1997), pp. 11-17.

members of this "House of Elders". "Shoot me, throttle me, but don't throttle democracy." After saying so, what did he do? He cried! Almost at the same time, Mrs. Najma Heputullah, Deputy Chairperson of the same House had official papers snatched out of her hands. On a single day, 26 July, 1991, the Rajya Sabha witnessed unruly scenes. Najma Heptullah had a tough time controlling the members. Mr. K.K. Tewari, the Congress MP, in the follow up procedure, in relation to his derogatory remarks against the Chairman, Dr. Sharma, was to be reprimanded by the House, but he did not care to appear before it in response to even the second summons which provoked scenes for about an hour. On another occasion when PM Mr. V.P. Singh did not introduce his new ministers in the Lok Sabha, almost entire opposition contended, that he had showed disrespect to the House, and staged a walkout. On another occasion PM's dignity was not maintained in the Parliament when Mr. Sharad Yadav and other MPs of his party made a concerted attack on him over the Women's Reservation Bill, in May, 1997. In one case when Minister Scindia, called the BJP *deshdrohi*, the debate was raked up whether he should retract the statement or not and this went for three days when the Lok Sabha could not carry out any other business, resulting a loss of Rs. 15 lakhs for Parliamentary sittings.

Deterioration of legislatures has advanced further in the states. The UP Assembly, in the post - 1996 elections period is the typical example of the most fundamentally affected legislative body in India. The body was splintered in a frightening way, with surmounting survival tensions of governments functioning under the Damocles' sword of no-confidence motion. Legislature continued to be a place of mindless theatricals and pandemonium, as in Rajasthan, and Gujarat. At worst, it was even in a suspend animation as in U.P., in 1996-97, when its

legislators were under siege by party coteries for guarding the flock from defection, and themselves always gripped by the fear of yet another costly election. Now parliamentary culture of tolerance in Nehruvian model of democracy has become extinct. This, thanks to nation-wide telecast of the "great anarchical-chaos", marked by shouting, abuse and hurling of furniture on each other in the House, in 1998, was seen and heard by the Indians and viewers abroad, more amusing rather than shocking. The legislators who supported the opposition coalitions in the post-Congress phase in U.P. are "inexperienced and, being a rag-tag coalition, could not enforce discipline. They are unruly lot, almost a rabble."¹ Governments were afraid to face them and they have no conception of their role. In Bihar, which is in as in other matters tends towards the lowest political denominator, the RJD government has circumvented the legislative process. The result was a reduction of legislative days from 179 to 263 in 1990 and 1991 to 57(1992), 73(1993), 53(1994), 65(1995) and 63(1996). Governments, rather than risk of the introduction of legislation, began to rule by executive ordinance, a procedure used when legislatures are not in session or for extreme emergencies. Ordinance were repromulgated when they expired. Between 1990, and 1997, the Bihar government repromulgated 86 ordinances.² The breakdown of the legislature in Bihar, while not typical, is suggestive of the atrophy that has beset most assemblies.

This atrophy is also evident in the fate of legislative committees. There has been number of cases of the non-attentiveness of the cabinet to their reports. In September, 1991, more than 60 members of the Lok Sabha belonging to different political parties wrote a letter to then Speaker,

1. Kuldip Nayar: *Hindustan Times*; January 13, 1994.

2. Quoted from D.C. Wadhwa and Kuldip Nayan: *Promulgation of Ordinances: A Fraud in the Constitution of India* (Orient Longman, 1998).

Mr. Shivraj Patil, protesting at the fact that the House had abdicated its responsibility of keeping close and purposeful watch over Government; with its decision to present a vote on account instead of a regular budget and the Question Hour, once a pride of the House, degenerating into a shouting slugfest and often suspended for the want of time, underlining the fact that parliamentary committees have not developed the specialised knowledge and staff needed to challenge the experts and bureaucracies of the political executive. In a significant decision taken to lend some "teeth" to Parliament, 17 Standing Committees were established in 1993, which would scrutinise demands for grants for the ministries in the annual budget and report to both Houses. The sessions of these committees will not be open to the public or the mass media, and if they wish, could summon senior bureaucrats and even external experts to testify before them. The decision to appoint these Standing Committees was the Rao government's answer partly to many years of non-discussion of the Budget grants of several ministries of lack of time, and partly to the proven uselessness of the consultative committees that had been formed in 1969 by merely deleting the prefix "informal", brought into being in 1954. The fact, however, remains that given the structural limitations of the parliamentary system, the new committee system has not been able to compete with the cabinet as an alternative focus of legislative authority, as there remained ambiguity over the issue of their role - advisory or extending to investigate and fact-finding problems. As a matter of fact, there is no link between a Standing Committee which decides on appropriateness of the demand and the acceptance by Parliament of the demands for grants. Chairman of the Standing Committee of Industry, Ashok Mitra, mentioned in his report that "while demand for grants for individuals ministries are considered in Parliament, recommendation

made by overwhelming majority of the Standing Committee fall by the way side".¹

As a result September 6, 1996 was set as the deadline for Budget discussion. The Lok Sabha passed in just fifteen minutes without discussion demands for grants of over 35 ministries totalling Rs. 454349 crores. The Ministries included Home, Defence, External Affairs, and Industry. In other words, matters related to security which directly affect the life, and liberty of the people were approved without examining the premise on which the Defence expenditure was posited, let alone how resources had been used in the past years. Thus the executive's accountability to Parliament, especially in matters pertaining to security which use up one-fifth of the government's expenditure, has eroded. One reason is that political parties are chary of challenging the Central executive's assumption and explanations. Under Mr. Narasimha Rao, the MPs belonging to the ruling party had remained silent even on controversial bills or policies with which they did not agree and about which they wanted to sound a warning in the larger interest. The whip has to be followed even when parties join hands together which have opposed other constituents of the conglomeration. Imagine the plight of a member who has to vote in support of a party which fiercely opposed him in his own election.

Further, Rajya Sabha has become a misnomer today. It was visualised by the Constitution-framers to be a group of senior experienced statesman, sociologists, economists, litterateurs, legal experts, scientists, artists and specialists, who could review the work of the lower House and act as its

1. "A Fading Forum", *India Today*, (March 31, 1996), p. 51.

friend, philosopher and guide.¹ Today's Rajya Sabha has become largely a body of those who have to be provided political patronage, who hesitate to get the people's verdict, or who have to be provided a berth on the Cabinet without being a MP. It is a tragedy of clean public life that a person of the integrity, wisdom, and stature of Dr. Manmohan Singh had to take the protection of a fake residence in the house of the CM of Assam. Why he have to do so? Just to fill the letter of the law and violate the spirit of the Constitution?

The principle of continuity of the Rajya Sabha is a laudable one but it makes the House as it is constituted a discordant factor. The example of the Bill on Intellectual Property Rights, an international-obligation undertaken by the country, created an impasse, when after it was duly passed by the Lok Sabha, was turned down by the Rajya Sabha only because the party in power lacked majority. Hence, when the Upper House is constituted continually and politically, its constitution does vary radically from the mandate of the people in the Lower (Popular) House. How will then the government of the day function if the Rajya Sabha should take an opposite stance in the fractured political scenario. The anomaly can last for a long time with serious repercussions. What is worst, when politically constituted, it might not represent the will of the people expressed in the general elections.²

The process of disempowering of Parliament is going on steadily. Though there are Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the Estimates Committee, and the Committee on Government

1. Om Mehta: *Role of the Second Chamber in the Indian Constitution* (New Delhi, Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New-Delhi), p. 9.

2. N.K. Trikhya: *Second Chamber of Indian Parliament* (New Delhi, Allied, 1994), p. 94.

Undertaking to perform the functions of a watchdog of the administration as it was witnessed in the Securities Scam, Sugar Scandal etc. The PAC has been thwarted in its attempt to independent functioning. The worst indictment of all is that the Parliament has been so totally straitjacketed and so completely misled that it could not investigate the single biggest political corruption of Independent India – Bofors. There was a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). But, it transpired, it was not an investigative committee but a cover-up committee, and the JPC report has not traversed, leave alone scratched the surface of the known terrain. This is not the failure of Parliament, but its gross abuse—a conscious, deliberate corruption of the political and constitutional process.

The same Parliament is known for pressing a resolution for the liberalising of the pension rules of the MPs, and at another time, increase in their perks and allowances within no time. Such a culture of Parliament has not helped the law-givers to formulate important policies, which affect millions of poor.¹ Though the Parliament and state legislatures still performs the important function of representing the mass public in the governmental process and of legitimisation of the formation, maintenance and actions of the government. One can argue that in the event of the party system failing to throw up a majority party government, the powers of the Parliament may come into a less constrained play, but one has to re-correct himself as today, the Anti-Defection Law, due to its loopholes, has made government simply accountable to itself, and, moreover, the government is very rarely turned out of office by the Parliament directly; they are thrown, instead, by a revolt from within the

1. See, the Opinion Poll conducted by Indian Institute of Public Opinion (IIPO), March, 1996, covered in *The Hindu*, April 1, 1996.

party. So, the very dignity and decorum of the august House is compromised.

The quality of legislative life depends on the quality of parliamentary leadership and, more importantly, on the legislators capacity to master and use legislative procedures. Legislators are increasingly unwilling to play the parliamentary game or to accept the possibility of this form of regulated conflict. Legislative debate and discussion is a highly stylised form of verbal combat – the legitimate *modes oprendi* of democratic dialogue, and discourse. If Parliament no longer performs the role assigned to it in the Constitution, it is because our old political culture has lost vitality and the parliamentary system has yet to adjust itself with the current political culture of coalition politics. The legislatures, both at the Centre and in the states, will mirror the cracked-glass image of this political process and will not return to their textual roles, before this political process, now a critical mass of warring molecules, regains stable scaffoldings. In the prevailing circumstances, no effort to improve the functioning of legislature can be more than half-hearted, nor even reasonably effective.

(V) THE JUDICIARY: ACTIVISM AT THE TOP

“Judicial Activism” is an ascriptive term and whatever it may denote differently, it has led to a public debate today. One offshoot arising indirectly from the concept is the debate about the process of selection and appointment of the Judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts. The controversy is whether the judiciary should have the primacy or the authority should be restored to the executive. Yet another issue which has also cropped up is whether the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the High Courts *vis-à-vis* the public interest litigation (PIL) should be curtailed by law or even by the constitutional amendment – idea emanating from the political executive.

"Judicial Activism" as in vogue today implies "intervention to combat the scattered hegemonies of power, masquerading public causes".¹ It involves innovative interpretation of legal nuances congruent with contingent needs of times and filling the gaps. It has been a continuous process in India and has been essential components of 'Judicial Review'. However, Judicial activism did not visit the High Courts and the Supreme Court for the first three decades of independence; judiciary meticulously avoided walking into the exclusive decision making domains of the executive and legislature.

In the first decade, with political stalwarts running the executive, and Parliament functioning with shine, the judiciary was understandably inclined to go along with the executive to the farthest extent possible. With the Constitution-makers denying the judiciary the power to impose 'due process' judicial standards on the administration, founded on the belief that the judiciary was generally not to be trusted², and Nehru's vision of future India, inspired by a mix of British Fabian socialism, Soviet economic planning and American 'New Deal' regulatory mechanisms, with full faith in the British inherited civil service, of creating a huge regulatory and welfare state through rule of law, did not give the judiciary to significant or creative role. The political expectations of the judiciary were that it should not

1. Upendra Baxi: *Courage, Craft and Contention*, (New Age Publishers, New Delhi, 1985), p.36, op. cit.

2. In simple versions of modern law, the judiciary has always been regarded with suspicion. Accordingly, the British judiciary in India did not possess any real and effective powers to strike down legislation or control or review the powers of the administration when India's Constitution was being drafted, fear was expressed of a powerful judiciary in no uncertain terms, with T.T. Krishnamachari straying into denigrating hyperbole when he called it (even the disempowered version of the Judiciary envisaged by the Constitution) a 'Frankenstein monster'. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. XI, pp. 6301-6305.

stand in the way of progress.¹ Hence in the fifties through half of the seventies, the judiciary on the whole, adopted a juridical-structural view of the Constitution.

The quantum juristic leap was made in the eighties with proliferation in PILs for social action and court's valid acceptance of them, along with Lok Adalats and Legal Aid, and Advisory Boards. This democratised the access to apex court and broadened the flow of information to the decision-makers, resulting in the ascendancy of fresh judicial scrutiny of governmental institutions and, ideologically, transformed the classical liberal fundamental rights into the paradigm of people's right expanding its scope. Although associated with the work of a group of judges, (comprising of Justice Bhagwati, Venkatachaliah etc.), the vision for the change should be attributed to Justice Krishna Iyer.

Justice Iyer, outlining the concept of judicial activism said "judges may intervene (i) if executive exceeds the conferred terms of power and, (ii) if state refuses to comply with statutory provisions. In an era where governments are weak, judges provide better guidepost to principled policies, so that they are not ignored. When elected representatives do not fulfil the legitimate aspirations of people and betray the mandate by power abuse, unfair procedure, unconstitutional action, or even lack of required action, it should surely be checked by judiciary. To bring back the rule of law in a peaceful manner, and not through violent means, judicial activism is the first step. As it becomes

1. When the judges sought to bring in more equitable compensation in the Zamindari abolition and land reforms cases, they were confronted with amendments to the Constitution and were, in turn accused by Nehru of having purloined the Constitution, for obstructing the empowerment of this mix of law and state (which in retrospect smacks of 'naïve instrumentalism') Rajeev Dhavan; "Judge and be judged", *Seminar*, (461, January 1998), pp. 79-84.

necessary to put a check on tyranny born out of a temporary political majority in legislature, which might seek to rewrite the Constitution in order to be entrenched in power; e.g., limiting the amending power by the Supreme Court in 1973 or when executive and legislature abandon their responsibilities.”¹

This definite shift in the approach of judiciary, marked by summoning the speakers of legislative houses to explain their act; frequently asserting its authority not only to delve into constitutionality, but also the merit of the duty-enacted laws, as for example, the Presidential prerogative of pardon; President's rule and emergency proclamation in S.R. Bommai Case;² asking the executive as to what laws should be enacted and when in the cases of All-India Judicial service and Uniform Civil code, Mina Mathur case has sparkled the struggle over stateness: judicial review *versus* parliamentary sovereignty.

Judicial intervention has been welcomed at a time when administrative malaise has compounded with large scale corruption. Yet, general and not just political doubt, seized the public on whether the high profile 'justice' offered by strong judicial personalities was a reliable way to summon Indian democracy to find its strength.³ Protagonists of judicial activism say that in any democratic country the ideal of welfare state is substantially assisted by the process of law by which socio-economic revolution is brought about through democratic social institutions.⁴ Judicial activism converges, interacts ethics with law

1. *Indian Express*, January 28, 1996.

2. Soli J. Sorabjee: "An Active Judiciary", *Mainstream*, March 26, 1994; S.Sahay; "Secularism is Basic", *Mainstream*, March 26, 1994.

3. Nikhil Chakravarty; "Judicial Activism, Right or Wrong", *Mainstream*, March 29, 1997.

4. Kuldeep Nayar: "Defending Judicial Activism", *The Hindustan Times*, December 17, 1996.

and mainly stems from the fact of failure of the other two wings of the state. When democratic institutions are extinct or moribund, higher judiciary is only possible redeemer of the cynically despairing situation. As C.J. A.M. Ahmadi opines, "The present situation is not really a case of one democratic institution trying to exert itself over another; rather, its a case of citizens finding new ways for expressing their concern for events occurring, at the national-level, and exerting their involvement in the democratic process."¹ When government fails to govern with "order" and "justice", ineffective in controlling the spreading canker of corruption in public life, the civil service is neither civil nor service, the police more an oppressor than a guardian of law; Parliament is paralysed costly debating body, grave constitutional issues are raised by citizens, and they exercise their fundamental right in invoking the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, which has led to expansion of its jurisdiction. Through novel innovative strategies, it is reprimanding politicians, warning police and dispensing justice to people who could never afford the luxury of litigation. Judiciary, thus, ensures that "neither the acts of commission nor of omission violate the basic requirement of a liberal arrangement, i.e., the authority be exercised fairly and justly."²

On the other hand, the opponents of judicial activism maintain, that it is trespassing into reserved spheres of Parliament and executive, auguring that it is a moot question whether these new procedures and schematic remedies were in fact, balanced and effective in their approach.³ For example,

1. *The Times of India*, February 19, 1996.

2. Nani Palkhivala: *We The Nation*, New Delhi, 1994; pp. 114-115.

3. Haridwari Rai: "Supreme Court's Dilemma", *The Hindustan Times*, January 20, 1996.

Court has assumed the role of issuing direction to CBI to investigate thoroughly and not to close any case without its order—a job of executive.¹ Within the court, the judges themselves were concerned that a PIL was becoming publicity interest litigation, with the public cause being fuelled by private interests, and many of them were simply unwilling to go along with the new PIL, forcing the court to re-examine its scope an exercise which still is not complete.

The main crux of the argument proclaiming the judicial activism as illegitimate is premised on:

- a) the court is not run on democratic lines, replacing an elected government by a nominated body—a dangerous trend towards authoritarianism.
- b) the court becomes vulnerable when it takes controversial stand on matters pertaining public policies as related to the telecom contract or politically sensitive issues as what constitutes “Hindutva”, since public debate could degenerate into irresponsible partisanship;
- c) the court lacks required knowledge to decide in cases calling for technical/scientific/medical expertise and capacity to make effective policy choices;
- d) the court is increasingly whittling down its prestige by passing unenforceable verdicts; and
- e) if such judicial activism becomes a pattern, then novelty will wear off sooner or later.²

1. *Frontline*, January 9, 1998.

2. Manoj Mitta: “Judiciary: Above the Law,” *India Today*, November 31, 1996; pp. 108–10; Sudhanshi Ranjan: “Denigrating the Legislature: Judocracy and Article 142”, *Mainstream*, June 14, 1997; Salman Khurshid: “Judges in Democracy,” *Seminar*, 449, January, 1997, pp. 30–32.

A great deal of contemporary controversies about the judiciary is motivated by vested interests who have been hurt by judicial orders, and some of it is media hype, anxiously trying to catch high profile stories and making issues more controversial in order to attain that profile. On balance, the constitutional interpretation is judicial function; so is the enforcement of public duties under the writ of mandamus. Even at the height of its present activism, court has not exceeded its power or usurped those of others. Where legal rights of people are involved, court always has jurisdiction. It has preferred to leave the enforcement of those rights not possessing 'adjudicative disposition' to political/administrative processes.¹ By 1992, the Vohra Committee has already concluded that India was in the hand of hoodlums at every level of administration. Operations in Punjab, Kashmir and the North-East and elsewhere has resulted in levels of atrocity that were unconscionable. Nuns were raped in U.P. and judges beaten in Nadiad (Gujarat) without effective official action being taken.² Led by C.J. Venkatachaliah, the court monitored these charges.

As the environment worsened, Justice Kuldeep Singh's *tour de force* in protecting the Taj, Delhi and various other areas became household news. Justice Verma's monitoring the Hawala case against leading politicians showed that judges were not willing to sit back and watch the subversion of law.³ As if to illustrate the point, Justice Verma also delivered the Babar Masjid and Hindutva judgements; and more generally took the

1. V. Kumar: "Frontiers of Judicial Activism", *Mainstream*, November 18, 1995.

2. Rahul: "Meek lay claim to their Inheritance," *Economic and Political Weekly* June 29, 1996.

3. V. Kumar: "Transformative Thrust of Hawala Jurisprudence", *Mainstream* March 1996

view that the judiciary should not be too much interfering by venturing into areas and issues which are not judicially manageable.

In case of monitoring institutions like jails and juvenile homes, it is wrong to say that court is administering them; for executive continues to administer them but with the added duty of reporting to court. Whereas the charge of 'epistemic' incapacity is concerned, it is to be noted that executive or legislators are probably more ignorant and novice, but judges are qualified to decide upon the constitutionality of a policy, which does not violate the principle of equality of law. To obviate the defiance in enforcing orders, court can use its contempt power or require senior bureaucrats to be present during hearing.

Mercifully, there is a reason to believe that a section of judiciary itself entertains doubts about assuring the mantle of a super government. As C. J. Ahmadi says, "Judicial activism is corrective measure and temporary one. Fears of judicial tyranny are really unfounded because judges are aware of that non-elected judiciary is neither meant nor equipped to act as a policy-making body."¹ Judicial pronouncement can never cover for inadequacy of government, or people's failure. For example, the case of female inheritance in property within joint family.

There are too many dangers to the judiciary itself from an omnipresent and rescuing judicial review. Sooner or later, the judiciary, point, Mr. Justice Verma, "Judicial activism and judicial restraint are two faces of the same coin. Self-discipline is to be practised strictly and judges must refrain from commenting on policy matters. Equally the 'activism should not become populism'."² Judges, too, are human, and prone to error, and aberration and so can not remain beyond accountability for their

1. 'Judicial Stand-off,' *Frontline*, (August 14, 1998), pp. 33-34.

2. *The Times of India*, February 19, 1996.

decision-making, both primarily and secondarily,¹ given a system in which the executive appoints judges on the advice of the judiciary (a system that does not always work well in India), their huge discretionary powers and an exponential growth of personality-based judicial decision-making (with the law being developed by particular judges amidst dissent by others). However, susceptibility to making mistakes in an otherwise closely monitored process cannot by itself affirm the lack of accountability. Yet, there is reason to believe that the higher judiciary is not free from corruption and indiscipline; and the Bar and the judiciary in India is often factionally divided resulting in all kinds of untimely and doubtful accusations.² Its track record has been suspect, its affiliations class biased, and its decision-making unpredictable.

But, over the decades, especially in the 1990s, it has improved its candidature for being the institutional guardian of value based justice. No doubt, the performance of the judiciary has been uneven. But even after a close scrutiny, it seems to come out ahead as an important institution of governance to assist democracy find its strengths. It is on this basis the

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1. Primary responsibility being affixed, in this context, on those who create the law and not those who simply interpret it. There is also a distinction to be made between *structural-democratic* accountability (which requires the decision-maker to account to some other, preferably democratic fora in respect of its decision-making) and *value* accountability where the decision-maker claims to give effect to certain inalienable (even if controversial) universally respected (even if not accepted) *values* identified with a civilised society. In hiding behind their so-called interpretative function and claiming only secondary accountability for their decision-making, judges and lawyers are being crafty rather than coy. V. Kumar: "Judicial Accountability", *Mainstream*, November 9, 1996: 8-10.
 2. "Judiciary is Corrupt: Bihar CJ," *Hindustan Times*, January 24, 1994. "North-South Twist. Ramaswami case", *Hindustan Times*, May 13, 1993. For a balanced commentary, Nikhil Chakravarty, "Save us from the Ramaswamis", *Pioneer*, May 19, 1993. Vijay Karan, "Revamp Criminal Justice System," *Hindustan Times*, August 27, 1992; *Pioneer*, November 21, 1993; 'Class-bound Judiciary', *Frontline* 26, 1997; V.Kumar: "Is Judicial Review Counter-Majoritarian ? ", *Mainstream*, August 10, 1996.

judiciary justifies its new found pre-eminence, which given the contemporary developments in India's plight is both necessary and proper. As India's million mutinies creep up on the judiciary and cry out for a rule of law, the judges need to be statesmanlike in the careful exercise of power, combining wisdom with craft and courage. Indian governance, too, must realise that the judiciary is a fragile, democratic gift that must be subjected to criticism but never irresponsibly.¹ The important question today is not whether the Supreme Court could activate its judicial role, but to what extent could the concepts of judicial activism and judicial creativity be combinely exercised. However, the constitutional doctrine in India is not explicit about a government based on balance of powers and does not feature the pursuit of institutional self-interest as a restraint on power,² so the controversies over the relative standing of judicial review and parliamentary sovereignty will continue to orient leaders and parties seeking power.

(IV) GOVERNOR: A POLITICIAN MAKES A MESS OF QUESTIONABLE GUBERNATORIAL DECISIONS

"The Governor is the watch-dog of constitutional propriety, and the link which binds states to the Centre, thus securing the unity of India," according to Mr. K.M. Munshi.³ From this emerges some very significant characters, having direct impact on state politics. First, not being elected but appointed by President, and his tenure secured at his pleasure, in reality implies, full say of the party/parties in power at the Centre, for former acts on the advice of latter's Council of Ministers. This in

1. Upendra Baxi: "Power and Social Action", *Seminar*, (437, January, 1996), pp. 49-52.

2. Baxi: *Sociology of law*, (1987); and for further reading see Baxi's highly pregnant introduction in Massey's *Administrative Law*.

3. *Constituent Assembly Debate*, Vol. XXIV., pp. 3496-3497.

a way makes him the representative of the Centre – a marked departure from the classical federal principle.² In a situation of conflict between the Centre and the state, he is likely to be influenced accordingly. Secondly, there may be conflict of views of the Governor and the Ministry on the issues of protection of the Constitution and well-being of the people in the state. Thirdly, discretionary powers granted to him for extraordinary and emergency situations, alongwith some normal powers, in practice, like that for the reservation of bills for President's consideration, in the context of the above two factors becomes crucial.

In fact, in practice, the proper conception of the role of Governor has been absent, and the manner in which it has functioned over the decades and in 1990s, it has flamed immense controversy on the subject. The deterioration of political norms and practices that has come in wake of multi-party ministries in the states, inter- and intra-party rivalries, defections and fragmentation of political parties, creating a situation where no party with absolute majority in the legislature, and no chosen leader in the majority party, provided background to Governor to reserve State Bills for President's assent, to direct the State cabinet to call the meetings of State legislatures, to make reports of the affairs of the state to the Centre and to cause ministerial changes. All these discretionary functions are over and above those exercised during the President's rule. As the Governors are merely employees and agents of the Centre, their extensive intervention in the state politics could not be but viewed only as inimical to the federal standards.

1. *Constituent Assembly Debate*, Vol. XXIV., pp. 3496–3497.

2. K.P. Karunakaran: "The Governor, The Chief Minister and the Coalition", *Coalition Politics in India*, (IIAS, Shimla, 1971); pp. 328–331.

Apart from this, in the specific political context of India where political loyalties are less ideologically bounded than by patronage, Governor is faced with the possibility of factional conflicts and defections. So swing in party position in the legislature has reason to make one believe that the Ministry in power might cease to be in the position to withstand the required test of collectively responsibility to the legislature. Theoretically, under such circumstances, Governor, as a Constitutional Head has a legal right to exercise his discretion in choice of new C.M. from amongst M.L.A.s., if he is able to prove his credentials openly by clearly identifiable criteria, i.e. all of the following: (1) Defections are real; (2) C.M.'s. refusal to summon the legislature was precisely to avoid the test of collective responsibility, and (3) the new C.M. and his Ministry would be able to withstand such test of strength.¹ In the absence of any spelt out criteria in any of these three pre-conditions and till such time they are codified, it is only Governor, independent of legislature, which can pass a judgement in those conditions.

The Governor's role in all three respects, viz. advising the President for the proclamation of Emergency under Act 356, appointing a C.M. in case of no party getting a clear majority and deciding the fate of C.M. in case of intra-party defection has been controversial. It has been felt to be influenced by political, and to be a great extent partisan considerations. The actions of Bihar Governor Mr. S. S. Bhandari and the M.P. Governor Bhai Mahaveer reveal that the Central government is misusing the office to serve its political purposes in the name of protection of Constitution, by spying on C.M.s of opposition ruled states.

1 C.P. Bhambri: "Governor and Coalition Government in the States", *Coalition Politics in India*, (IAS, Shimla, 1971); pp. 125-129.

In M.P., the governor's actions like granting 'sanctions' for the prosecution of two former Congress-(I) minister in land- deal case, appointment and removal of VCs of Rewa and Jabalpur Universities led to confrontation with the Government of Mr. Digvijay Singh. In U.P., the then Governor, Mr. Romesh Bhandari acted in a reckless manner in dismissing the BJP-led Government of Mr. Kalyan Singh and installing the Jagdambikapal Cabinet. The only rationale for Mr. Bhandari's rather questionable gubernatorial decision, third in a sequence, was premised rather uncomfortably upon the assumption that a wrong is set right when it is compounded¹. His specific reference to the 1995 precedent, when Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav was dismissed as a C.M. without the courtesy of a trial of strength on the floor of Assembly, did make this clear.

The case of Gujarat in September - October 1996 is comparable to U.P. 1997 in constitutional terms as well. Here a BJP government elected with a two-thirds majority faced a mortal challenge from Mr. Shankar Singh Vaghela's revolt and breakaway, backed of course, by the main opposition, the Congress-I. The Suresh Mehta's Ministry got its floor test and "won" in on September 18, 1996 (through the ingenious device of evicting members of entire Opposition and the rebel BJP -MLAs). Next day the government was dismissed and the Assembly placed in suspended animation.

In view of this conscious neglect of the subject of evolving conventions, and guidelines, it was not surprising that on all

1. Romesh Bhandari: "Appointment of the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister : Powers of the President and the Governors," *Politics India*, (July 1997); pp 6-13; *Frontline*, (March 20, 1998), pp. 4-8. In October 1996, Mr. Bhandari had recommended the extension of President rule in the state beyond the period of one year. A year later in recommending the dismissal of the Kalyan Singh Government, after it had survived a trial of strength, the Governor seemed in due haste to ascribe blame for the violence that had broken out that day in the assembly.

issues pertaining to the discretionary and other powers of the Governor, the matter had to be taken to the higher courts for relief. The judgement of the Supreme Court in this case involving dismissal of the BJP-ruled state governments in Himachal Pradesh, M.P. and Rajasthan, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid has laid the ground rules clearly, but unfortunately, the latter episodes merely demonstrated that this was no bar or safeguard against Art. 356 fraud-induced crisis.

Because of their alleged partisan attitudes, there has been a long standing demand for the abolition of the post of Governor. West Bengal C.M., Mr. Jyoti Basu has said, "Most Governors tended to serve the interests of the Centre, and this has been demonstrated in the activities where their discretion is called for. The ideal course would be to abolish the post...."¹ Former Bihar C.M. and R.J.D. President, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, has alleged that "the Governor (S.S. Bhandari) was trying to make law and order an issue to have the government dismissed in his bid to appease the BJP's ally, the Samata Party and save the Union government from falling."² Bihar state Assembly even moved a resolution demanding the recall of the Governor. In the Lok Sabha, RJD members made the same demand alleging that he was "conspiring" to destabilise the Rabri Devi Government and acting as R.S.S. Pradhan.

Hence, the office of Governor has come in for criticism, particularly as regards the background, and the performance of Governor's rule, and the need for resolution at the state-level of conflict that leads to the Central rule. The inside view is that

1. *The Hindu*, November 12, 1996.

2. *Frontline*, March 12, 1999, pp. 130

periods of Governors rule have been worse than normal cabinet system of governance. Such periods have accentuated problems that led to such a rule. Bureaucracy-battering intensified and it made no difference to the treatment meted out to the administration. Political interference levels only get transformed in nature, they do not get eliminated. Of course, this is a temporary dispensation but the performance even under longer spells has been unsatisfactory.¹

The Supreme Court, on its part has made it clear that—"The Governor is the Head of the state, and holds a high constitutional office which carries with it important constitutional functions and duties and he cannot, therefore, even by stretching the language to a breaking point, be regarded as an employee or servant of the Government of India. He is not amenable to the directions of the Government of India, nor he is accountable to them for the manner in which he carries out his functions and duties. This is an independent constitutional office which is not subject to the control of the Government of India."²

But the authority of Governor, even in discretionary field is not unrestrained, and if it is misused in a partisan manner the President can check him. When the Vajpayee Government wanted to use Art 356 in Bihar on the basis of the Governor's report, President Narayanan sent back the cabinet recommendation with a note for reconsideration. Several conventions have emerged which help the Governor in smooth functioning.³ While exercising the discretion, great caution, and

1. Kamal Prasad: "Bihar Crisis and the Union Cabinet", *Mainstream* (October 17, 1998); pp. 6-12.

2. Dr. S. A. Palekar: "Governor and Discretionary Powers", *Politics India* (February 1999), pp. 3-4.

3. S. Viswam: "Outcome of President's Initiative", *Mainstream*, (June 21, 1997), pp. 3-5.

restraint must be adopted, otherwise the Governor's role as the protector of Constitution and the dignity of office gets tarnished. However, being an integral part of the state political apparatus, apart from being a "link" between the Centre and state, Governor still has to function not only with meticulous fairness and demonstrable impartiality, but seen as well to be functioning so.

(VII) CHIEF MINISTER: CHANGED OFFICE, AND EXCRUCIATINGLY COMPLEX JOB

State governments and the chief ministers (C.M.) who head them have actually become important in the recent years. The opening of India's economy to market forces since mid-1991 has in many ways increased their autonomy. Intrusions from on high declined since the national election of 1989 ending the Gandhi dynasty's time in office. The hung Parliaments that emerged in subsequent years made P.M. somewhat less inclined to intervene at the state-level. Moreover, the decay of political institutions means that more ride on the decisions of individual leaders. Chief Ministers loom large in the politics of their state because nearly all of them lack strong party organisations that would enable them to interact systematically with other forces in their states. This leaves them badly exposed and compels them to wheel and deal frantically in order to survive politically. Their performance becomes disproportionately important to the fate of their state.

In their capacity to provide stability and adequate governance, the C.M.s, in the 1990s have to wrestle incessantly to maintain political legitimacy in face of concrete demands from the electorate. Since the composition and character of society vary greatly from state to state, they are far more thoroughly enmeshed in the complexities of state-society relations than any

P.M. can be.* So it is mainly their decisions that determine how the government resources amongst various interest groups are to be distributed, making key judgements about the pursuit of political accommodation or the use of coercive force.

This is a relatively recent development. During the first two decades after Indian independence, C.M.s from the Congress party ran nearly every state and the Congress organisation in those days had both sinew and reach, operating in the various Indian states like the political machines that used to dominate politics in many American cities. A disciplined network of skilled political managers co-ordinated the distribution of government controlled goods and services to a large number of key interest groups, extending from the state capitals down to districts, sub-districts, and local levels. Chief ministers thus had instruments of governance that were usually more than adequate to their task. But the Congress organisation was systematically crippled by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who saw it more as a threat to her personal dominance than as a tool to help her govern well. In most states, the parties that have arisen to challenge Congress have also failed to develop strong organisations linking the state capitals to the grassroots. This makes it difficult for the C.M.s from those parties to govern effectively—though they are partly to blame for inadequate party-building.²

Many C.M.s tried to centralise power in their own hands, coalition being a stop-gap arrangement in their calculations, but only a very few, whose vote getting ability exceeds that of their parties, could manage this, like Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, and

1. This is apparent from several of the studies in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, ed. James Manor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994).

2. James Manor: *Chief Ministers in Indian Politics*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), p. 26-27.

Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav. Others who attempted it, soon provoked rebellions from potent factions that destroyed them, as was the case of Gujarat the BJP's riddle, involving Mr. Keshubhai Patel, Mr. Shankar Singh Vaghela and Mr. Kashiram Rana in mid-1990s. If they are sensible like Mr. Sharad Pawar¹ and Mr. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, they adopted a dual strategy of playing of factions against each other, and decentralising some power and resources in order to forge ties to powerful subordinates.

Those who decentralised in this way often grasped a crucial subtlety—that leaders at the apex of complex regional political systems in India make their impact penetrate downwards more effectively by means compromise than by seeking to dictate. Too much centralisation can, paradoxically, weaken C.M.s by cutting them off from potential clients and backers. Many decentralisers still found, however, that their underlings are so undisciplined, and desperate to grab whatever they could that factional strife ripped a party carefully constructed transactional networks. They then expended much of their time and political capital patching up deals with contending groups. In 1990s the M.P. State—units of BJP and Congress both experienced groupism, even factionalism and brutal decline of party discipline.

C.M.s also need to decide how to handle corruption. Some centralisers seemed to deprive subordinates of moneymaking opportunities—either to minimise corruption as Mr. Sunder Lal Patwa, or to monopolise it in order to fill their own pockets, their party's coffers, or both, as was the example of Ms. Mayawati. This inspired immense resentment from underlings, many of who are in politics mainly to profiteer. Other decentralised such

1. For an excellent, detailed analysis of this see Lakshmi Iyer: "Pawar Masterminds Rebels' Strategy," *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), January 24, 1995.

opportunities, on the assumption that legislators who are busy enriching themselves will seldom rebel. This strategy often backfired, however, since legislators' appetites tended to exceed what a C.M. could offer, and there are always dissident leaders who promised them greater gain if they topple the man on top.

Many C.M.s resorted to actions, postures or promises intended to have mass appeal, especially among the poor. Some of these being downright reckless.¹ The Akali leader Mr. Prakash Singh Badal became C.M. of Punjab in late 1997 by promising two things: heavy subsidies of urea and free electricity to farmers. Either of these measures would have nearly crippled the state financially the first because the proposed subsidies covered more than 80% of the cost of urea and the second because almost 35% of its revenues come from taxes of electricity.

Some populist gestures, however, are carefully designed not to imply specific promises, and they often work well. When Laloo Yadav had himself photographed milking a cow, he reminded members of his cowherd caste that he delights in his and their humble origins. When Mr. Biju Patnaik, septuagenarian C.M. of Orissa, rode a bicycle to the office to dramatise the need to conserve fuel, he got a useful point across and reminded citizens of how extraordinary he is.

Still other gestures go at least partly wrong. The same Patnaik invited citizens to "beat up" errant officials (providing he gave prior approval), in order to deflect resentment about ineffective government on to bureaucrats. It worked for a while, but then he was embarrassed by requests for permission to thrash him for failing to fulfil commitments, and eventually angry civil servants assaulted him as he left the office.

1. K.K. Katyal: "Paying for Populism," *The Hindu*, October 2, 2000.

Some C.M.s like Mr. Manohar Joshi tried to insulate bureaucrats from lobbying by legislators and others. This was a favourite device of centralisers, but it made them seem dangerously unresponsive and undemocratic, and it often provoked rebellion among their subordinate and leaders of powerful interests. Others like Mr. Om Prakash Chautala went to the opposite extreme by allowing legislators and politicians to browbeat bureaucrats into permitting illegalities. This won support from those who gain wealth and influence as a result. But it demoralised the bureaucracy, and C.M.s who tried this often lost credibility and control over events amid runaway corruption. Canner leaders sought a balance between these extremes, but that has been an exceedingly tricky task that calls for constant shifts of emphasis that overburdened politicians are often unable to make.

All C.M.s tried to channel patronage (funds, goods, and services) to social groups from whom they hoped to receive votes at future elections, but with important changes. During the first two decades after Independence, the Congress Party, maintained its dominance in nearly every state by distributing resources, in a largely successful effort to keep every conceivable interest group happy. Since the late 1960s, other parties have often gained power by targeting not 100% but 60 to 70% of the population – whether the Hindu majority, clusters of disadvantaged castes, or other groups. Rising political awareness, even among the poor, has made it more difficult to paper over divisions between higher castes and lower, industry and labour, urban and rural dwellers. Congress too, has often given way to this trend. But using patronage distribution to forge majority coalitions became increasingly difficult for all parties, for several reasons.¹

1. James Manor, *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Slow economic growth has meant that the resources available for distribution have not kept pace with the rising demands from interest groups. Mounting corruption among politicians that money that might have been allotted as patronage has been skimmed off by individuals. Growing indiscipline within ruling parties made them less capable of distributing resources effectively. And since mid-1991, economic liberalisation has reduced the funds available to state governments. So while most C.M.s tried to make the most of patronage politics, it yielded fewer advantages than it used to.

Some C.M.s made extensive use of their coercive powers, entailing threats of unwanted transfers or disciplinary action against civil servants to dragoon them into co-operating. Or it meant the use of the bureaucracy, the police, or even gangs of toughs to intimidate or brutalise interest groups, NGOs, opposition parties, and even opponents within one's own party. Other C.M.s used both sticks and carrots in subtle combinations. While this often enhanced their power, it proved to be difficult to avoid contradiction between these two approaches. Those who depended mainly on tough tactics usually had to pay a heavy price at election time.¹

In recent years, C.M.s have had to face difficult new choices in their pursuit of economic development. Economic liberalisation has forced them to devote more attention to attracting private sector investment and less to patronage distribution. But even more important has been the need to choose between huge development projects like dams, irrigation systems, or major hospitals and small-scale schemes at village level—wells for drinking water, the building or repairing of schools, medical dispensaries, rural roads and the like. After

1. Ibid., p. 157

decades of emphasising the former, they have seen governments in a few states become enormously popular by stressing long neglected smaller projects that bring directly visible benefits to villagers.¹

The issues discussed above include only a few of the tactical choices that confronted C.M.s. They also had to decide whether to try to mobilise comparatively dormant social groups to broaden their base, or to divide, intimidate, or otherwise demobilise certain groups or both at once. They had to compulsorily find a balance between fermenting social conflict and mitigating it; between dramatising politics and lowering the political temperature and popular aspirations (as P.M. Mr. Narashimha Rao has systematically done); between generous responses that assuage grievances, and a hard line in the face of pressure from interests; between making themselves easily available and remaining aloof, between leftist and rightist policies – and much more in the wake of coalition era.

Most C.M.s tended towards moderation in the most tactical choices listed above. There is, of course, no correct set of postures to adopt in all situations. The appropriate choice will depend on the personality of the C.M., the condition of his party, and the opposition, the socio-economic milieu, and many other things. But most of those who have been at least partially successful share a few traits.

First, they have frequently adjusted their postures on these various issues to respond to changing circumstances, being compelled to do so by the volatility of Indian coalition politics. This means that relations – within parties, between different

1. James Manor: "The Political Sustainability of Economic Liberalisation in India", in *India: The Future of Economic Reform*, ed. Robert H. Cassen and Vijay Joshi (Delhi: OUP, 1994).

parties, between parties and interest groups, and among various interest groups – tended to change quickly, often and unexpectedly. Second, relatively successful C.M.s have made these adjustments in a measured manner. It is usually unwise to make drastic changes, since this can give the impression of panic and earn a leader a reputation for wild inconsistency. Continuous fine-tuning is being essential. Finally, such C.M.s understand that if they shift their position on one issue, they may need to make adjustments on others either to maintain consistency, or, by contrast, to balance interests.¹

In judging the overall performance of C.M.s we need to recognise that the serious factional squabbles that most of them face within their parties have produced starkly different outcomes for the Congress Party C.M.s and those from other parties. Since 1990, many Congress C.M.s have been unseated between elections because Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Narashimha Rao were suspicious of strong state-level leaders, and had the power to oust them when factional fighting (which they often fermented) became too intense. By contrast, the other parties either purely regional or their state-level units had greater leverage than their national leaders, so ousters scarcely occurred.

This does not mean that non-Congress C.M.s have overcome factionalism. It has plagued them and undermined their government effectiveness, often severely. But factionalism is usually less unbridled than in the Congress Party, and much less threatening for them. Congress C.M.s whom national leaders have imposed often toppling others, continue to suffer extreme

1. K.P. Karunakaran: "The Governor, The Chief Minister and the Coalition", in his ed.: *Coalition Politics in India*, (Shimla, IAS, 1971), pp. 328-31.

infighting, as their enemies within the parties cling to the hope that if they can create enough havoc, yet another ouster may occur.

And yet, despite these and other difficulties and the extreme complexity of their task, a significant number of C.M.s have performed well enough to get re-elected. Major Indian states witnessed 51 state elections between 1985 and March 1999, and incumbent governments won 19 of these. The defeat of the other 32 reminds us of inadequacy of many C.M.s. But when we consider the immensity of their problems, and the volatility of coalition politics, those 19 victories (37% of the total) are reasonably impressive.

How did this happen? The explanation is complicated. In part, it has to do with the quality of the people who have served as C.M.s. Few could match Mr. Shekhawat or Mr. Basu for adroit leadership, but crucially, few have been such wretched leaders that they were bound to fail. Fortunately, these incompetent C.M.s have done limited damage to institutions for two reasons. First, Indian voters are perspective enough to have thrown such leaders out on every occasion when they presented themselves for re-election, and replaced them with less destructive figures and parties. Second, the electorate has been able to do this because India's multi-party system, despite much decay, is creative enough always to have produced at least one alternative who while may not always have been particularly impressive, was at least a significant improvement on the incumbent regime. Further, most C.M.s neither sink to the level of incompetence mentioned above nor rise to the ingenious heights represented by Mr. Basu¹ or Mr. Shekawati. The majority of them have muddled and struggled along in the job, often in confusion and distress.

1. Harish Khare: "Basu Beyond Bengal", *The Hindu*, 1 November, 2000.

So their own political skills clearly do not explain the electoral success of so many. If, however, we look beyond these leaders, or rather below them to the people whom they lead, we will discover vitally important skills to provide much of the explanation. These political skills are found in abundance at all levels of the Indian political system, in nearly all states, and parties which tend to enable organised interests to exert pressure on state institutions and to extract concessions. They facilitate frequent adjustments and renegotiations in state-society relations to respond to changes, and permit many (though not all) conflicts between caste, class, religious and other groups to be fought out in semi-civilised way, which tend to enhance the authority of those in power and the legitimacy of open politics.¹

C.M.s who can maintain a minimal amount of rationality and order in the political process as a sizeable minority have done, create conditions in which activists can deploy these skills to deliver reasonably adequate governance. Among the many things that C.M.s can do to facilitate the work of lower level activists, one is often crucial. By containing and managing factional conflict within the ruling party, they can limit its potential damage and enable activists working within the various factions to play constructive roles. Factions within the ruling party often can assist the party to make government responsive to important social groups. Activists within factions collect information on felt needs and discontents among citizens and transmit it to the politicians they help to engineer responses by those politicians and to explain their views and problems to

1. This emerges in R. Crook and James Manor: "Enhancing Participation and Institutional Performance: Democratic Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa," (Report to the Overseas Development Administration, London, 1994)

citizens. Factions recruit skilled activists who can perform these tasks, and they mobilise support for faction leaders at and between elections. They criticise excesses by leaders and members of other factions, and this sometimes helps to check such behaviour. In this direction, some of them have been sufficiently skilled to ensure the re-election of their governments, and under even mediocre C.M.s, institutional decay has been checked and a kind of rebuilding has occurred, suggesting that India is governable through its existing democratic institutions.

(VIII) BUREAUCRACY: PARTISAN AND SELF-SERVING

If it is the bureaucracy that holds the mirror to a government, its current state presents a sorry and patchy image. The perennial benign sentries or praetorian of the system, is now highly politicised and corrupt.¹ In the coalition era, when the parties are expected to be treated on equal footing and when the nominal head of the government happens to belong to a party without numerical superiority in the Assembly, but perched in that position by virtue of its bargaining advantage a question of political propriety arises whether such a person can afford to issue orders to the officials of a department which does not come under his direct jurisdiction by invoking his nominal and titular headship of the government. And with the unscrupulous inconsistency with which political leaders are playing their role, the relationships between the political leaders and the civil servants is an important factor generating changing political demands, ultimately determining the political stability of the coalition rule.²

1. "Crisis of Credibility", *India Today*, (March 15, 1997), pp. 45-46.

2. K. Seshadri: "The Civil Servants and the Coalitions" in *Coalition Politics in India*, ed. by K.P. Karunakaran (IIAS, Shimla, 1971), pp. 332-340.

It has been suggested that bureaucracy had adjusted itself with the Congress Party because of its monopoly of power for more than four decades of post independence India. This false alibi provided by the defenders of "delinquent" officials has also lapsed because the new political context of the 1990s has made alternation of parties a reality both at the state-level and the Centre. This should have facilitated the emergence of an impartial bureaucracy. However, the bureaucracy has continued with its journey of forging political alliances with political parties irrespective of the opportunity provided by the changing context of coalition politics. This proves that political alignments of the bureaucracy are not dependent on either the early monopoly of power of one party or the contemporary shifting character of ruling and opposition parties.¹ A politicised bureaucracy has become a fact, and its capacity to enforce rule of law in a professional manner is under great doubt.

The rub arose when other political parties had come to share power in the states at first instance, and then came to share power in the Centre. A great deal of speculation and theorising has been let loose regarding what the civil servants have to do when political leadership pulls them in different directions and tend to twist the 'steel frame' into grotesque contortions.

As long as the civil services know the common agreed policy, they should have no difficulty in implementing it, unless: (i) the minister concerned himself is insincere about the policy to which he had agreed at the beginning and (ii) the civil servant is not in sympathy with the programme agreed to by the coalition government. In both cases there will be interference from the

1. C.P. Bhambrí: "Of a Partisan, self-serving Bureaucracy", *Pioneer* (23 September, 1998).

minister directly concerned. In the former case he will not let the civil servant take the implementation of the policy seriously and in the second he will openly clash with the civil service and complain against its wooden headedness and conservatism. The minister who is indirectly concerned with a particular programme will have to clash with the slow-going minister and settle accounts at the ministerial level.¹ As in Karnataka and Orissa, the ministers themselves came into clash with each other, leading to the prevalence of a sort of uneasy administrative paralysis till the crisis took shape in the dissolution of the Ministry. This is a major political crisis with far-reaching effects only where some of the parties in the coalition are parties seriously interested in changing the socio-economic stagnation with a expeditious measure. The other coalitions as those of U.P., Bihar or Punjab are more opportunistic and changes are only palace intrigues where the commitment or non-commitment of civil servants is irrelevant².

This is well conformed by senior level bureaucrats, who came to occupy the highest positions in coalition regimes. Writing in 1998, Mr. T.S.R. Subramanian, the former Cabinet Secretary, lamented the fact that many ministers 'treat a file like a goldmine.....a playground for him to milk. These ministers want bureaucrats to play ball with them and facilitate their making money. And many bureaucrats, unfortunately, do play ball with. Many ministers under the UF Government of Deve Gowda, and Mr. I.K. Gujral, made 'illegitimate' decisions. He gave example of the former UF Railway Minister, who wanted to push through clearance of around 35 railway projects, but as Cabinet Secretary he (Subramanian) was forced to intervene and

1. K. Seshadri, Ibid.

2. Shivendra K. Sinha : "Fifty Years of Indian Bureaucracy", *Politics India*, (August, 1998), pp. 20-22.

stop it. Narrating the incident, Mr. Subramanian recalled that he told the Railway Minister that the Railways already had projects, which will take 70 years to complete, so they should reprioritise and shorten the list and come back. He narrated another experience, when a minister under the Gujral Government took untenable decisions about which the Secretary complained to him as Cabinet Secretary. Subramanian reported the matter to P.M. Gujral, who found the secretary's viewpoint to be correct and asked for the files to be placed before the Cabinet. He writes: 'Though I can't speak about what transpired at the Cabinet meeting, decisions of the ministers were overruled by the Cabinet at the behest of the P.M. As far as I remember, this has never been done before'.¹

How politically motivated have been the top-level appointments can be seen easily. The post of the Cabinet Secretary is number one in the civil service: the occupant is called the 'conscience keeper' of the bureaucracy. The post had to be filled up when Mr. Subramanian demitted it in March 1998. It was surpassing to hear Mr. Gowda referring in his Independence Day speech that he was being pressurised to choose a Cabinet Secretary on the basis of caste, creed and religion and that he would not give into such pressures. It was an extraordinary confession from a P.M. but one thing looked pretty certain: the higher civil service had become politicised. The UF Government under P.M. Gowda, and Gujral wanted to promote the *Dalit* factor.

A crude indication of politicised bureaucracy was the selective extension of service granted to retiring civil servants. The care-taker Gujral Regime had given extension of services to 12 top level Government officials. The list included Cabinet

1. Quoted by S.R. Maheshwari: "Re-inventing Public Administration in India", *Politics India*, (August, 1998), pp. 8-10.

Secretary, Home Secretary, Director, CBI, I.B., Foreign Secretary, Chief Secretaries of U.P. and Tamil Nadu.¹ The business of extension is based on personal discretion; and observes no set criteria, and thus, rightly attracted the wrath of the Supreme Court. The carrot of extension makes the functionaries pliant and pliable.

The general observation bears clear testimony to the thesis that a non-committed bureaucracy means a stagnant retrograde bureaucracy. Today, the dividing line between the politicians and the bureaucrats is extremely thin. It is a lame excuse to maintain that politicians have destroyed Indian bureaucracy. Bureaucracy in India has long developed and operated a network of linkages and alliances for remaining in power that predates the coalition era of 1990s and it has but only more benefited by its politics of caste, community and business. The moral decay and degeneration of the topmost bureaucratic ranks have been widely admitted, even by the 'insiders' like the former CEC Mr. T.N. Seshan, who caused storm when he called bureaucrats' "polished callgirls" at the service of politicians² and Mr. M.K. Kaw, who "unmasked" the IAS in a book entitled 'Bureaucrazy'.³

[B] **POLITICAL ECONOMY: ENVIRONMENT, POLICY CONTENT, IMPLEMENTATION, INTERESTS AND MINDSETS**

(I) MASS POLITICS OR ELITE POLITICS

In answering the questions: (i) why was India's minority government in 1991 successful in introducing economic reforms, whereas a much stronger government with a three fourths majority in Parliament was unable to do so in 1985? and (ii) why

1. *India Today*, (January 31, 1997), pp. 64-65.

2. *The Times of India* (October 23, 1993).

3. M.K. Kaw: *Bureaucrazy: IAS Unmasked* (Delhi, Kornark Publishers, 1993).

have post-1991 reforms made substantial progress in some areas but was stalled in others ? argument draws a distinction between mass politics and elite politics. Scholars of economic reforms have generally assumed that reforms are, or tend to become, central to politics.¹ Depending on what else is making demands on the energies of the electorate and politicians—ethnic and religious strife, political order and stability, corruption and ‘crimes’ of the incumbents—the assumption of reform centrality may not be right. The main battle lines in politics may be drawn on such issues such as how to avoid (or promote) further escalation of ethnic conflict, whether to support (or oppose) political leaders, if there has been an attempted coup, whether to forgive (or punish) the ‘crimes’ of high state officials. Paradoxically, it may be easier to push through reforms in a context like this, for politicians and electorate are occupied by matters they consider more crucial. Economic reforms may not cause the political opposition they otherwise would.

In democracies, especially poor ones, mass politics can redefine elite politics, for an accumulated expression of popular sentiments, and opinions inevitably exercises a great deal of pressure on elected politicians. Elite concerns— investment tax breaks, stock exchange regulations, custom duties on imported cars – do not necessarily filter down to mass politics. The more direct the effect of a policy, the more people are affected by it and the more organised they are, the greater the potential for mass politics. Not all aspects of economic policy invoke passions and have such effects like ethnic disputes which tend quickly enter mass politics; some do, other do not. For example, by affecting

1. This is also true of the two most comprehensive and widely read political economy texts on reform: Haggard and Kaufmann: *Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), and Przeworski: *Democracy and the Market* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

more or less everybody, high inflation quickly gets inserted in mass politics.¹ Contrariwise, capital markets directly concerns only the shareholders, whose numbers are not large and who are not organised.²

In multiethnic societies like India, economics may simply be one of several issues on the political agenda, and not always the most contested one. Ethnicity may be more contested, stirring mass passions and determining alignments of political parties, both ethnically based parties (which may defend or repel attack on their ethnic groups) and multiethnic parties (which may fiercely fight attempts to pull some ethnic groups away from their rainbow coalitions). Evidently, in the largest ever survey of mass political attitudes in India,³ only 19% of the electorate reported any knowledge of economic reforms, even though they had been in existence since July 1991. Of rural electorate, only about 14% had heard of them, whereas as the comparable proportion in the cities was 32%. Further nearly 66% of the graduates were aware of the dramatic changes in economy, compared to the 7% of the poor, mostly illiterate. In contrast, close to three fourths of the electorate on the whole were aware of the 1992 Mosque demolition in Ayodhya; 80% expressed dear opinions whether the country should have a uniform civil code or religiously prescribed and separate laws for marriage, divorce and property inheritance; and 87% took a stand on caste based affirmative action.

1. With the exception of those whose incomes are protected by inflation indication.

2. Again, in countries where mass privatisation have taken place and shares have been distributed to the masses, this may not be true.

3. The survey was conducted by the CSDS see *India Today*, (31, August, 1996). All figures cited below one from that survey.

These statistics reveal that the raging debate over economic reforms in India, practically, confined to the English language newspapers, the country's graduates, the internet discourse, the Bombay Stock Exchange, and Delhi's India International Centre and its economic ministries. That is the circle of India's elite politics. Economic reforms were simply a non-issue in the 1996 and 1998 elections. In mass perceptions, the significance of identity politics has been far greater than the implications of economic reforms over the last 10-15 years.

Is India peculiar in this respect? Has the predominance of identity politics hurt India's economic reform? Answer and the principal argument to these questions, is that the passions aroused by identity politics have facilitated economic reforms in India, not hurt them. How to stop Hindu nationalists from gaining politically and coming to power was the primary objective of most mainstream political parties between 1990-91 and 1997-98. New alignments of political interests, thus, came into being. Whether or not politicians in the past were opposed to a market-oriented liberalisation, they increasingly began to support reforms once it became clear that it was more important to fight Hindu nationalists on questions of religions politics versus secularism than oppose the government of the day on economic reforms. The political logic induced by explosions of communal passions gave the reformers room to push reforms.

The same logic, however, has also defined the limits of economic reforms. Afraid that the masses and their own party cadres or supporters might turn against their parties, India's reformers have failed to privatise public sector, restructure labour laws, introduce agricultural reforms and reduce fiscal

deficits to low levels.¹ These policy areas can potentially bring reforms in mass politics, which the reformers have resisted. Instead, considerable overall progress has been made on liberalising the investment, trade and exchange rate regimes, and reforming capital markets. Touching very few people in India directly and in the short run, these latter reforms have been an elite concern, having no direct impact on mass welfare, which can be easily demonstrated in electoral politics.²

The argument should not be construed normatively. It is primarily explanatory, and empirical, attempting to understand and explain why India's politicians have behaved very differently with respect, to the various aspects of reforms, embracing some policies warmly but showing great caution on others. The elite – mass distinction is simply to disaggregate politics and present an explanation for these puzzling, varying rhythms, which can be a serious issue in the democratic politics.

(II) IDEOLOGY VERSUS PRAGMATISM

There has been an absence of ideological thrust in India's reform programme, which is arguably one of the causes behind the moderate speed of post-1991 reforms. To be sure, there is consensus on reforms across the political spectrum, but its nature is somewhat odd and should be noted. Political leaders and parties are implementing reforms, but not making clear ideological arguments in favour of reforms. If ideological arguments are made, they are made with great tentativeness. Economic reforms are yet to be boldly presented on the

1. The 1998 budget, presented on 1 June to Parliament, made some moves in the direction of privatisation, but there is no visible progress on it yet.

2. This is not to say that trade policies and exchange rate, by affecting a whole range of prices, do not have a bearing on mass welfare. In economics, however, where trade/GDP ratio is not substantial, these policies do not have a short run and direct impact on mass welfare.

ideological platform of political parties. They are yet to be made into the centrepiece of electoral campaigns.¹

Consider for examples. Neither in 1996 nor in 1998 and, 1999 did the Congress party, which initiated reforms, turn its policy breakthrough into a theme for electoral campaign. Nor, for that matter, did the BJP even explain to the electorate though it has historically been in favour of freer internal trade and business (not freer external trade and foreign investment), why a more market driven economy would be a better economy for all. The fact that the trading and small business community has traditionally supported the BJP in northern and western India has always made the party oppose the bureaucratic regulation of trade and business, but the BJP leaders have never clearly articulated why a less regulated economy is not only in the interest of traders and businessmen, but also the masses in general. In the 1998 election manifestos of the BJP and Congress, considerable space was given to economic policy, but the electoral battle was won over whether Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the ace campaigner of the Congress party, was an Italian or an Indian, whether her entry into politics was an example of dynastic hold over Indian democracy, and whether the BJP would moderate its anti-Muslim stance. Economic policy, as in the election before, was hardly debated.

This raises a serious political question. Why do the economic reforms have such low electoral salience in India ? Or, why are they so perceived by politicians? Explanation can be structured around three hypotheses.

First, the contingencies of India's political economy in the last two decades are partially responsible for why economic

1. C. Rammanohar Reddy: "Consensus that never was", *The Hindu*, (15, April, 2000).

reforms are not a matter of high electoral importance. India's economic crisis in 1991 was not as deep as that of Latin America or the Communist bloc before they started reforming their economies. In the aggregate, growth performance below the nation's potential for four decades did add up to a big economic loss, but it was not concentrated in any particular period of the nation's post-1947 history. It was a slow, but steady accumulation of welfare losses.¹ A democratic India did not have to go through the excesses of Cultural Revolution or a Great Leap Forward. In its search for a better political and economic future, India successfully avoided 'excessive-misery' – famines and cultural revolutions – but it failed to obliterate 'regular misery' – malnourishment, illiteracy, hunger. When India's economic reforms began in 1991, there was considerable mass-dissatisfaction with Indian polity, and economy, but the whole system had not been rendered illegitimate in the gaze of the masses. An absence of excessive misery made a radical change in economic rhetoric harder. As a result, not even the ace reformers of India, – Dr. Manmohan Singh or Mr. P. Chidambaram, and their respective parties, the Congress or TMC – have found a large ideological space in politics for a market-oriented rhetoric. Slow deterioration simply does not focus mass energies the same way as a *blitzkrieg* of failure does.

Second, constrained though they may have been by myriad regulations, India's industrialists and businessmen, unlike those in the United States, have never enjoyed popular legitimacy, except in 'business states' like Gujarat and Maharashtra. Few businessmen win elections outside these states. Of all the occupations from which elected legislators have come, business

1. Jagdish Bhagwati: *India in Transition* (New York, Clarendon Press, 1993).

ranks among the lowest in India's Parliament since 1952.¹ Businessmen's riches may have been envied but, in popular perceptions, their endowments and gains have always been suspected to be a consequence of connections, bribery or foul play, not of hard work or imaginative business strategies. The extent of which the state in India intervened in economic life, of course, made much of this inevitable, for it was hard for most businessman to thrive without pleasing the bureaucrat and the politicians. But suspicion of business, and traders may not simply be an artefact of state regulation.

As a deeper reason – India's traditional folklore is full of stories that view the business castes – the Vaishyas – with suspicion and blamed for creating and exploiting scarcities, for fleecing the poor, and for usury while lending money to the needy. The transference of this cultural image from pre-industrial era, when competition in the market place can make unprincipled rent-seeking difficult, is utter folly, but cultural constructs are sticky and not prone to quick disappearance. A whole host of bureaucrats and politicians in India have routinely been heard by researchers to argue that unless regulated and disciplined by the state, the market would only hurt the poor, and the businessmen would 'squeeze' the consumer and the poor, as there would be no checks on their profit-making instinct.²

If the reasoning above is right, then we have potentially an answer to one of the puzzles of India's reform politics: viz., that even the reformers are afraid to turn their success into elections rhetoric, i.e., freer business environment does not have mass political constituency in India. In an era when 'lower' castes, who

1. Ashutosh Varshney: *Democracy, Development and the Country side: Urban-Rural Struggle in India* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

2. Myron Weiner : *The Politics of Scarcity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1962).

have often viewed the Vaishyas as exploiters and also aired that sentiment openly, have risen in politics, politicians find it hard to make a case of freer business and trade.

Thus India's reforms did not simply result from an ideological conversion of politicians. They began as a logical consequence of serious macro-economic imbalance. The foreign exchange crisis of July 1991 gave not only the IMF and World Bank an opportunity to insist on policy change, but also reform-oriented bureaucrats inside the government to pursue then long cherished agenda. A possibility of financial collapse led to a new resolve at the governmental level. Once the opening was provided, a politic consensus on reforms began to emerge simply because reforms worked, even though moderately.¹ Since 1991, economic growth rates have gone up, many of the consumer goods that the burgeoning middle classes need are cheaper, and considerable international attention has been paid to India's economy.

If India's economic reforms had failed to push up the growth rates after 1991, their survival in the absence of ideological convictions, would have been highly unlikely. Success, even if moderate, has sustained reforms in India. This reasoning leads us to the third big question about the interaction of ideology and pragmatism in India's reform politics. If the success of reforms can undermine ideological objections to them, why can success not be turned more fervently into a political asset? What will finally bury the suspicion in India-lessening on

1. See ICSSR-CSDS - India Today poll in *India Today* (August 31, 1996), which shows that an average citizen has done better than in normally believed, showing a mood of cautions welcome and a desire for incremental change. But, people also do not want the framework of equality and welfare to be abandoned.

the whole but still lingering – that the reforms are meant for the rich and the upper middle classes, not for the masses?

In a country where decent work, income, education and health are still seen by millions as a distant goal, the ultimate *political* rationale for reforms is, and would have to be, not easing rules for business, but creating more jobs and incomes, and providing better education and health for the many.¹ The former may be the means for the latter, but it can not be the principal political end.²

This inevitable political truth about reforms in a poor democracy needs to be better understood in India's elite politics. India's business press, its business intellectuals, and its reform-oriented economists have continued vociferously to argue in favour of greater economic efficiency, better business environment, and greater economic integration with world markets. It is clear, however, that while all of it is economically desirable, it cannot be a strategy of political mobilisation, or constitute the main theme of the political rhetoric in a poor democracy.³ A preoccupation with economic efficiency cannot motivate India's politicians in their political campaigns.

(III) ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF COALITION/MINORITY REGIMES AT THE CENTRE

(a) The Rao Government (1991-6) :

Compared to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, P.M. Mr. Narasimha Rao was weaker in Parliament. Unlike former's three-fourth majority,

1. Nirupam Bajpai and Jeffrey D. Sachs: "Development and Goal-setting" I and II; *The Hindu* (10 & 11 May 2000).

2. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ibid.*

3. Parthasarathi Shome and Hirañya Murkhopadhyay: "Economic Liberalisation of the 1990s: Stabilisation and Structural Aspects and Sustainability of Results" *Economic and Political Weekly*, (July 18, 1998), pp. 1925-1934.

the latter's government did not have majority support when it came to power in July 1991, it added some more seats its strength in March 1992 but it was still short of a majority. Yet, whereas Mr. Gandhi de-licensed only a few industries, the Rao government de-licensed all but a few. Mr. Gandhi lowered corporate and personal income taxes, the Rao regime reduced them further. Average tariff rate was 87% when Mr. Gandhi lost power; it was brought down to 25% through successive reductions. Under Mr. Gandhi, capital markets had no foreign investors: under Mr. Rao, foreign portfolio institutions were allowed, rules for FDI were liberalised, and in 'key' sectors, such as power, 100% foreign ownership was permitted. Finally, unlike Mr. Gandhi, the Rao government had to sign a stabilisation agreement with the IMF, which is often politically controversial in the developing world. Arguments about the Rao regime mortgaging the nation's economic sovereignty could easily be made.

Why, then, was the Rao government more successful? In and of itself, the depth of the crisis of 1991 could not have sustained reforms, hence it is necessary to know how the crisis was perceived, and resolved in India's political institutions. A serious change in economic policies cannot be authorised by an executive decree if parliamentary approval is a requirement. If India's Parliament had not passed the budgets, the new economic policies would have been still-born, not because of faulty economic logic but due to the institutional constraints of a parliamentary system. Why did Indian Parliament, in which the Congress government did not have majority support between 1991 and 1993, pass the budgets in September, 1991, May 1992, and May 1993? These three budgets contained the bulk of India's reforms.

The debate on the first two budgets – in July – August 1991 and March – April 1992 – was bitter and charged.¹ Opposition politicians made trenchant arguments in House about the actual or impending loss of economic sovereignty to the IMF and the World Bank. In February 1992, it was alleged that the budget proposals had been submitted to the IMF for its prior permission before being presented to the Parliament. 'None of us ever thought that India will one day come to depend on the mercy of the IMF and the World Bank', said the parliamentary leader of the BJP.² 'The sovereignty of Parliament has been breached and the economy of the country had been subjected at the feet of the World Bank and IMF', said the leader of the third largest party and former Prime Minister.³ 'Will all the conditionalities which are being imposed on us, be imposed on the US, if their budgetary deficit is twenty times more than that of ours?' said a third important opposition leader.⁴

A second set of political criticisms was about the pro-rich and pro-urban orientation of the new policies. 'I would call this budget anti-poor, anti-former, anti-development and pro-inflation', argued an important member.⁵ 'The Government T.V..... (is) propagating unlimited consumerism of big companies through advertisements,' argued another.⁶ Finally, there was the apprehension that reform would lead to retrenchment from public sector undertakings. 'What is going to be the result of all this? 9 Lakh workers belonging to public sector banks will be

1. *Lok Sabha Debates*, X Series. See especially speeches in 1991 by : Jaswant Singh, BJP, 29, July, A.B. Vajpayee, BJP, 5 August, and Indrajit Gupta, CPI, 31 July. Also relevant were speeches cited in later notes for 1992.

2. A.B. Vajpayee, BJP, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 23 March 1992, p. 1015.

3. V.P. Singh, *Lok Sabha Debates*, X Series, 24 February, 1992, p. 1.

4. Chandrashekhar, former P.M., *Lok Sabha Debates*, 25 March 1992, p. 962.

5. H.D. Deve Gowda, Janata Party, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 31 July 1991, p. 296.

6. A.B. Vajpayee, BJP, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 23 March 1992, p. 1011.

unemployed in the next two years where will they find jobs?¹

Yet, despite these criticisms by leaders of all major non-Congress parties, the first three budgets of the minority Congress government were passed. All opposition politicians were willing to launch criticisms, but only few were willing to block the budget at the times of voting and unseat the Government.

They did not do so because by 1990, Indian politics had become *triangular*.² Between 1950 and 1989, the principal battle-lines of politics were *bipolar*. The Congress was the party of government, and all other parties were opposed to it. Between 1990 and 1997, a triangular contest developed between the Left, Hindu nationalists, and the Congress party. Coalitions were increasingly forged against the Hindu nationalists, not against the Congress. To begin with, the Communists and the lower caste Janata Dal and its allies – disliked the reform, but they disliked Hindu nationalism even more. Especially, to the lower caste Janata Dal, it posed the greatest threat. The former wanted to organise the low Hindu castes against the upper castes, whereas Hindu nationalists were trying build a united Hindu community against the Muslims, seeking to override and displace caste as an issue in political mobilisation. The triumph of one implied the eclipse of the other. The Congress party, a foe in the past but declining ideologically, was no longer the principal enemy of the Janata party.

1. George Fernandes, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 25 March, p. 929.

2. This situation has some similarities with games analysed by Alt and Eichengreen : "Parallel and Overlapping Games", *Economic and Politics*, (1/2 July 1989).

For the Janata, then, economic reforms were secondary in importance. For the BJP, too, building a temple at Ayodhya, the campaign for which had brought such remarkable electoral dividends was much more important than the economic reforms.. Both the Janata and the BJP bitterly criticised several aspects of the reforms in 1991 and 1992, but neither was prepared to issue a 'parliamentary whip' to its party-men in the House to vote against the Budget. On matters of high political importance, such whips are issued to enforce party discipline in voting. Vote on the budget being left to their conscience, some would vote against, others in favour and some would simply abstain.¹ Co-ordinated voting was necessary between the BJP and Janata and its allies to defeat the budget, but that did not happen.

Once Hindu nationalists demolished the Mosque in December 1992, the Janata and its allies became even more convinced that Hindu nationalists had to be contained. Most Janata members voted in favour of the 1993 budget, whereas all BJP members present in Parliament opposed the budget for the first time.² That was not enough to defeat the budget. India's economic reforms kept progressing because the political context had made Hindu-Muslim relations and caste animosities the prime determinant of political coalitions, polarising the electorate and national politics, causing a great deal of anxiety about law

1. In 1991, both the BJP and Janata and its allies abstained from the House at the time of vote on the budget Cf. *Lok Sabha Debates*, (14 September 1991), and *The Hindu* (15 September 1991). In 1992, only 56 votes were cast against and as many as 227 in favour of the budget. Virtually the entire team of Congressman voted in favour of the budget in both years. Cf. *Lok Sabha Debates*, (6 May 1992).

2. Of the 120 BJP MPs, 99 were present at the time of budget vote, and all voted against the governments. Most Janata MPs obtained. Cf. *Lok Sabha Debates*, (5 May 1993), and *The Hindu*, (6 and 7 May, 1993). The CPM was the only party which voted consistently against the budget between 1991 and 1993, not the BJP or the Janata, showing that reforms were of greater ideological importance to the communists than to the others. The BJP and Janata were, on the whole, strategic, not ideological, about voting on the budget. After 1993, the Congress, partly by offers of patronage, managed to get a near-majority in Parliament and did not have to be concerned about parliamentary vote.

and order in the country. Hence, economic reforms were crowded out of mass politics by issues that aroused greater passion, and because they were crowded out, reforms could go as far as they did to the advantage of reformers.

(b) The United Front Government (1996-8) :

In February 1997, at the World Economic Forum at Davos, India's humble farmer P.M. Mr. Deve Gowda stated that India's economic reform process is "predictable and irreversible". And committed there that "this will call for hard political decisions, but I want to dispel all suspicion and concerns about the pace and directions of reforms around which there is a national consensus".¹

However, as in most governments, the reform rhetoric of the UF sometimes outpaced actual action. There can be little doubt that reforms were once again moving on the track- the more so after the somnambulism that characterised the last two years of Mr. Rao's tenure as P.M. Mr. Chidambaram's audaciously bold budget of February 1997 rekindled, the spirit of reforms that had petered out in 1995 and 1996, nevertheless, Mr. Gowda, like his predecessor was unable to demonstrate political will on two counts: (i) criticism of the reform from within the ruling alliance mainly from the Left to push the reform process, particularly regarding policies of disinvestment, privatisation and insurance policy, and (ii) the signals of the Indian State remaining a 'soft state' loomed large again, being unable to discipline itself rigorously taking follow-up measures like curtailing governmental expenditure or jobs or to reduce subsidy; and enforce economic discipline to corporate sector and people at large.

1. *The Hindu* (23 February, 1997).

The P.M.'s claim of a national consensus was a half-truth, at best. While the Congress Party prodded the Gowda Government to charge ahead on the path of reform, the CPM-CPI and the Samajwadi Party advised it to go slow and tread cautiously. Moreover, the vast masses feeling the sense of "relative deprivation", unable to cope, among other things, with the steep rise in the prices of essential commodities, (blaming the government's open general license policy which allowed their export), applied intermittent brakes on the reform process and the UF government, thus, remained defensive.

Mr. Chidambaram indirectly echoed the concerns of the critics of the reforms when, at Davos he said that reforms would run parallel to programmes aimed at the quality of life for those Indians who are out of the reform's loop and that the government was not considering any plan that would lay people off work in significant numbers. His interpretation of political dimensions of reform economics is also interesting. Referring to the current political rough and tumble scenario, the management graduate from the Harvard shrewdly said that he viewed it more as a "dynamic instability" that would prevent "complacency from setting in !".¹ Now, people have heard other run-of-the-mill political leaders running away with such sophistry, but this was not expected of him, as it is not political instability which is as much responsible for the slow flow of reform, as the uncertainty about the long-term policy of liberalisation which should be consistently followed and carried further.

It must be mentioned here that the need for political stability for achieving the goal of rapid economic growth should not be confused with a demand for "divorce of politics from

1. *Frontline* (2 March, 1997), p. 19.

economics" as asked by leading Indian industrialists.¹ This is not the issue; it is rather of the directionlessness of economic decision-making, as witnessed during the unstable, and faction-ridden UF government. Both Mr. Gowda and his successor Mr. I.K. Gujral operated in adhocism. With the erosion in the political standing of P.M.'s status, every cabinet minister followed an economic policy on the basis of his own whims and fancies. If Mr. Chidambaram was a great liberaliser as Finance Minister, the Civil Aviation Minister did not allow the Tata Airlines project because of some "national interest as interpreted by him".²

In the mid-1990s, it became more difficult for the ruling UF government to mediate in the conflicts between economic development and political democracy for two reasons. In the realm of politics, too, the old consensus had turned into a new dissensus, as divisive issues such as caste, religion, language and regionalism multiplied. Second, a short-termism had replaced the long-term perspective of yesteryears. In the sphere of economics, the preoccupation with stabilisation in the medium term, which is natural for the IMF and the World Bank, led to confusion between tactics and strategies of the UF government. In this milieu, political parties and their leaders constituting the UF, thought only of the next month or the next year or, at most, the next election, which led to a neglect of long-term development objectives. There are two reasons for this. First, such objectives cannot be defined in terms of performance criteria laid down by the multilateral financial institutions. Second, they do not bring tangible political gains which can be

1. *Business India* (November, 1997), p. 83.

2. *India Today* (9 August, 1997), p. 31.

exploited by governments within one term as they seek to renew their mandate in the next elections. This short-termism also led to 'hysteresis' – the effect of short-term policies or actions which persist overtime to influence outcomes in the long term.¹ The past influences present, just as the present shapes the future, if economic policies or political actions have consequences which are irreversible after a time lag.

(c) The BJP-led Coalition Regimes (1998-Onwards):

Obviously, as the government was being sworn in, the economy needed urgent attention, and if there were to be any sustainable economic recovery, specific policies would have to be put in place quickly. In addition, expectations were raised by the BJP's own vociferous protestations while in Opposition that the economy was on the wrong track, that there needed to be more of "swadeshi" orientation to economic strategy, and that the focus should be on the needs of the domestic markets.

But from the first few months it became clear that these earlier statements were not to be taken seriously. Indeed, it had already been apparent to many observers that the very conception of "swadeshi" economics as presented by the BJP was not just flawed but ultimately directed towards serving the interests of international capital.² But the rapidity with which this was established through the practicalities of governing may

1. This argument about the long-term consequences of short-termism, in the context of public policies and economic growth, is developed at some length by Deepak Nayyar: "Short-termism, Public Policies and Economic Development", *Economic et Societies*, (vol. XXXII, no. 1, 1998), pp. 107-18.

2. See Thomas Blom Hansen : "The Ethics of Hindutva and the Spirit of Capitalism" in T.B. Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds.: *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi, OUP, 1998), pp. 291-314; C. Rammanohar Reddy : "Dangers of Swadeshi", *The Hindu*, (October 28, 2000).

have come as a surprise. In addition, within the economy the impact of the party's traditional base among the impact of the party's traditional base among the trading community also became evident in a range of policy measures that effectively operated to redistribute income to this group.

In terms of accommodating, or even succumbing completely, to the interests of international capital, the list of "achievements" of the Governments is long. The first significant act of the BJP-led Government only two months into office was the announcement of nuclear strength. But this supposedly nationalist declaration was speedily sought to be counterbalanced by a willingness to accept economic subjugation.

In the very week after the Pokhran explosions, the Cabinet quickly pushed through Central Government counter guarantees for four fast-track power projects in different states. Since these assure high dollar rates of return to the foreign investors even if the domestic consumers cannot be charged more and/or the rupee depreciates, they are likely to imply fairly large budgetary outlays in future. In the same week, a large number of oil exploration contracts and mining concessions were also awarded, mostly to United States - based companies, in a blatant attempt to barter away the mineral and resources wealth of the country in return for the dubious privilege of joining the nuclear club.

Subsequently, the overt attempt to placate foreign capital and the U.S., became even more pronounced. The Exim Policy announced in 1998 involved a substantial liberalisation of consumer goods imports, which was remarkable and unwarranted given the context of domestic industrial recession and a large trade deficit. Imports have been further liberalised in

the subsequent Exim Policy unveiled in March 1999. The two annual Budgets presented by Mr. Yashwant Sinha contained measures designed to enthrone international investors: the decision to allow foreign institutional investors (FIIs) to purchase share in newly disinvested profitable public sector and various other measures aimed to woo foreign capital.¹

The clearest expression of the orientation of the Government was in the determination to push through two very controversial Bills, relating to the Patents Act and the opening of the insurance sector to private domestic and foreign players. The BJP's attitude to these was in direct violation of its pre-election programme, and also against the wishes of other members of the Sangh Parivar, and it neatly exposed the hollowness of the party's claims to represent "swadeshi" interests.

However, to ordinary citizens, the two most important economic effect of the BJP's rule have probably been the dramatic like in food prices and the dwindling of productive employment opportunities, dominating the latter half of the 1998. It became highly politically sensitive as well, since it reflected post-harvest hike which were much larger than what is seasonally normal, with the benefits clearly accruing to stockists and traders. Speculative pressures were intensified by the fact that other channels of investment remained uninspiring, given the sluggish stock-market, and the continuing recession in domestic industry. So once more speculation in food items, which used to be a feature of the India economy in the 1960s and 1970s, became a pervasive factor even in determining the

1. Jayanti Ghosh : "The Economic Effects of the BJP", *Frontline*, (March 21, 1999), pp. 100-102.

overall rates of inflation. And this tendency was encouraged by the acts of omission and commission of this Government.

Thus, early into its tenure, the BJP-led Government allowed the Essential Commodities Act to lapse on the grounds that it was a device "open to abuse by the enforcing agencies". Inevitably, this gave a free rein to trading speculation over 1998. When the public outcry against it became too much for it to handle, the BJP was forced to make some gestures towards the control of speculative activity which was widely seen as the root of the problem.

Consider also the basic issue of dealing with industrial recession. In periods of demand downturn, governments must spend more, in order to ensure that employment and economic activity are maintained. Instead, over fiscal 1998-99, the Government actually managed to spend less in money terms than its own budgetary targets in plan outlays generally. In real terms the gap was, therefore, even larger, and this had major negative implications in crucial sectors such as agriculture and rural development, irrigation, industry and minerals, transport and infrastructure.¹

The Budget 1999, similarly, did not have any expenditure measures designed to counteract the economic stagnation, and offered very little in terms of ensuring real economic revival.² Further, since, all new taxes were in the forms of surcharges which are not shared with the states, they add to fiscal centralisation, contributing to the continued shortage of resources for state governments, which are mainly responsible

1. *Business Today*, June 7-21, 1998.

2. R. Dubey : "The Boomerang Budget: Corporate India and Budget 99", *Business Today*, April 22-28, 1999.

for crucial expenditures on education, health, power and transport infrastructure.

This economic centralisation is interesting. On the one hand, the BJP-led coalition was substantially different from the earlier UF Government, because it was not a coalition of more or less equal parties, but one of a large party dependent upon the support of the smaller regional allies. This meant that each of the allies felt that they had to extract from the BJP their specific regional demands, rather than work for the stability of the Government as a group. For example, the Akali Dal demanded and extracted a "huge" increase in the minimum support price for wheat in 1998, and various other parties managed state-level packages to further their own interests.

On the other hand, the basic thrust of the economic strategy was still a centralising one, especially in terms of fiscal patterns. It is interesting that a Government that was so dependent upon regional parties in the coalition acted in a budgetary sense to work substantially against the interests of the state governments, with the Central Government actually taxing them so heavily through higher prices of food and diesel, and diverting so much of expenditure control regarding rural development from the states to the Centre that is bound to erode their electoral credibility.¹

The NDA's track record does not generate enough optimism about its determination to push ahead with economic reforms, taking the bold, hard, decisions now. Not only the Cabinet, but the NDA as a coalition, seem to be vertically split when it comes to reforms. With some of its constituents gearing for Assembly election in their states – West Bengal, Punjab and Tamil Nadu to

1. Jayanti Ghosh, *Ibid.*

name a few – in early 2001, their leaders find it difficult to swallow the bitter pill at this stage.

The roadmap for the second generation of reforms may be ready. Mr. Sinha listed the Fiscal Responsibility Act, a competition law, key banking sector reforms, opening up the telecom and insurance sector and above all a detailed review and revamp of the labour laws for a start.¹ It remains to be seen what shape these measures take when introduced in Parliament. Given the parliamentary arithmetic, the NDA can muster a majority only in the Lok Sabha. It will have to look to the main Opposition, the Congress, for support to pass any legislation in the Rajya Sabha. But the problem is not so simple, because of the internal division within the NDA. Some of its constituents such as the Shiv Sena, the Lok Dal (of Mr. Chautala), elements in the Samata Party, the JD(U), and Trinamul Congress, and above all, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch along with the other groups in the Sangh Parivar, are opposed to key features of the reforms programme that hurt the consumers or lobbies such as that of farmers.

Luckily for the NDA, the Congress has completed the process of churning on its economic policy approach. After some dithering, a mega-committee set up by Ms. Sonia Gandhi, finally endorsed the Rao-Manmohan Singh reform programme. The party would like to keep the credit for initiating the process of liberalisation without giving it away to the NDA and the BJP. But it will certainly not hesitate to make political capital out of the visible differences within the NDA.

Take for instance, the Fiscal Responsibility Act; it was a dominant feature of the Congress manifesto and could therefore

1. S. Ambirajan: "The Second generation reforms", *The Hindu* (8 January, 2000).

expect that party's support. But when it comes to liberalisation in the banking and insurance sectors, there is bound to be opposition from across the political spectrum. Since most parties run their own trade unions as well, they will come under tremendous pressure to oppose the opening up of these areas.¹ They will also be against disinvestment of key public sector undertakings, when they come under axe. Till now, the Government has taken up only the smaller and less controversial undertakings for disinvestment, except for the two airlines – Air India and Indian Airlines. The move to corporatise some of them, notably in the telecom sector, may provide reprieve for the present. But within next two years, this process has to gain momentum, and the 2002 deadline for many of the WTO commitments has to be met. That is when the problem will get aggravated.

(IV) ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF STATE-COALITIONS

In all areas of economic liberalisation in the fullest sense – policies aimed at making more effective use of the market in the allocation of resources, trade policies that are consistent with international liberal trade regime, educational policies that lead to an increase in employment – the policies of the state governments can play a decisive role. As one former government official writes: “Given the substantial role of the states in development, it is clear that policies and priorities, whether they relate to stabilisation and structural adjustment or to long-term development, will depend crucially for their realisation on the political will and the administrative competence of state governments”.² In the 1990s, coalition-governments at the state-

1. V. Jayant: “The NDA & economic reforms”, *The Hindu* (26 October, 2000).

2. S. Guhan: “Centre and States in the Reforms Process”, in Robert Cassen and Vijay Joshi, eds.: *India: The Future of Economic Reforms*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.82.

level were run by different political parties and competitive politics should have made the performance of individuals state a matter of high political and electoral interest, with liberalisation reducing the degree of control exercised by the Centre in many areas leaving much greater scope for state-level initiatives, as far as attracting investment, both domestic and foreign, it concerned.

But for the most part, the reform process in the states has proceeded slowly. State governments maintain large fiscal deficits, and have done little to address the need of the social sector, significantly reduced bureaucratic regulations, privatised or reformed inefficient state-run enterprises, stimulated investment, expanded and reformed primary education or improved tax-collection.¹ Here the question arises: Are state-coalition to be seen as power houses for economic reform or as impediments to it? What role have they played so far in the liberalisation process? In this context, it is particularly important to study the differences among states in order to extract lessons about what works and what does not.

As is well known, the impetus for economic reforms in India was a crisis in the balance of payment and surmounting fiscal deficit that brought the country to near bankruptcy, rather than a political crisis of the regime or demands by organised interests for the adoption of market friendly policies.² The business community and the middle classes had been shielded from the world economy by the protective apparatus of state policies in place for more than four decades. There was little

1. Nirupam Bajpai and Jeffrey D. Sachs : "The State of State Govt. Finances-I & II", *The Hindu*, (6 & 7 December, 1999); Rohit Saran : "We are Broke!", *India Today*, (February 14, 2000).

2. See Robert Cassen and Vijay Joshi, eds.: *India : The Future of Economic Reforms*, (Delhi: OUP, 1995); Vijay Joshi and I.M.D. Little : *India's Economic Reforms; 1991-2001*, (Delhi: OUP, 1996).

protest that the country's growth rate was significantly lower than that of other Asian Countries, its public sector a financial drain on the economy, or that India had such a minuscule share of global trade. None of the state governments had called for economic reforms since they were among the political beneficiaries of state-led industrial policies and the regulatory regime. When economic reforms were introduced, first by P.M. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and his finance minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, then in a more comprehensive fashion by P.M. Mr. Rao and his finance minister Mr. Manmohan Singh, the Central government made no special efforts to explain the new economic policies to state governments.¹ Nor did it seek to educate members of the ruling Congress party, the opposition parties, or for that matter, the wider public. The previous economic regime was ideologically and structurally so well entrenched that a frontal attack by protagonists of reform appeared to be politically risky, and, hence, liberalisation policies were allowed to "trickle down", as it were, from the P.M., his secretariat, and the finance minister to the Cabinet, from the Cabinet to the Congress party, from the government to the opposition parties (with the notable exception of the BJP, which was an early advocate of deregulation and internal liberalisation), and from the Central government to the states.

There are differences among the coalition-ruled states in the character and pace of reforms, but surprisingly, the differences are not ideologically based, even though some state-coalitions are under the control of communists, others of Hindu nationalists, and still others of regional parties. A few of the states under coalition-rule like Maharashtra have been more reform-oriented. But Punjab and West Bengal have lot to catch

1. James Manor : "The Political Sustainability of Economic Liberalisation in India", in Cassen and Joshi, (1995), p. 351.

up with. Bihar and U.P. are even further lagging reformers. This classification is based on their performance in terms of the SDP growth, FDI, industrial investment proposals and software exports, among other variable.¹ But, by and large, innovations have come slowly, and reforms have been incremental, not transformative. There are three reasons.

One reason is that state political leaders have short-term political horizons. Several state governments are coalitions of diverse political parties. Chief Ministers are often opposed by factions in their own parties and state leaders know that if they politically falter, there is risk of President's rule. U.P., for example, has had 27 governments in 44 years, with CMs as on average, have been in office for only 2.65 years, since 1967. Moreover, the political mobilisation of India's OBCs, SCs, STs and religious communities has turned state politics into arenas in which political leaders are concerned with maximising short-term visible benefits for their own community exploiting differences among caste and religious identities in order to win electoral support. The political process in the states may be democratic, but it is not conducive to the pursuit of liberal economic reforms.² The classic political economy formula for inaction—that governments are unwilling to adopt policies when they have short-term concentrated losses and long-term dispersed gains – is particularly acute when state-coalition CMs know it is politically difficult to remain in power through their full term. The implications for sustaining economic liberalisation policies by state-coalitions with short-term time horizons are obvious. States are reluctant, for instance, to cut subsidies in the anticipation that the improved fiscal situation will provide

1. Nirupam Bajpai and Jaffrey D. Sachs : "Reforms in the States-I", *The Hindu*, (24, January, 2000).

2. Montek S. Ahluwalia : "Economic Performance of States in Post Reforms Period", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (May 6, 2000), pp. 1637–1648.

them with the resources needed for infrastructure investments that in turn will attract investments and an expansion of employment. The political consequences of cutting subsidies are immediate. The political benefits too long for weak coalitions.¹

Secondly, the prevailing political situation in India's states reinforces a truism with respect to economic reforms elsewhere: critics of reforms are often well organised, politically influential and opposed to reforms that involve concentrated short-term losses, while beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries are not well organised, less influential, and may not even be aware of the long-term benefits that the reforms may provide. Trade unions oppose state-coalition policies that permit retrenchment of labour, closing of bankrupt plants, and privatisation of the public sector. Both nationally and locally, an odd coalition of Leftists, Gandhians, and Hindu nationalists, oppose foreign investment in consumer goods sector. Agriculturists oppose reductions in subsidies in electric power, irrigation, fertilisers, and other agricultural inputs. NGOs oppose projects they believe will result in population displacements or environmental degradation.² While within the central government there are officials with a longer-term perspective who can provide a countervailing tendency, at state-level there are fewer knowledgeable individuals attuned to the requirements for economic growth, and technically equipped to address the long-term issues.³

1. E. Sridharan : "Leadership Time Horizons in India: The Impact on Economic Restructuring", *Asian Survey*, (Vol. XXXI, No. 12, December, 1991), pp. 1200-1213.

2. Nirupan Bajpai and Jeffrey D. Sachs : "Reforms in the state-II, III", *The Hindu*, (25-26 January, 2000).

3. S. Ambirajin, *Ibid*.

A third factor slowing the reform process is that state and local party officials and bureaucrats are reluctant to give up the patronage, and the rents that are required through the regulatory system. Patronage in public sector enterprises remains an important source of jobs for the politically powerful backward castes that would be lost through privatisation. Moreover, officials gain from the maintenance of regulations which require the inspection of places of business and renewal of licenses, while officials responsible for monitoring power and water use and for tax collection are beneficiaries of existing arrangements. An ICRIER study reported that while state governments have sometimes officially eliminated many of the inspection rules for commercial establishments and factories that result in widespread corruption, these changes are mainly on paper in all but a few states like Maharashtra and Karnataka.¹

[C] POLITICAL CULTURE : CASE OF CONTESTING PLURAL ENGAGEMENTS

(I) THE TRIANGULAR CONTEST OF ARCHITECTONIC (MASTER) NARRATIVES

Compared to its part, India today is less statist, less secular, less dominated by the upper castes, and more democratic. With the exceptions of lesser secularism, all these trends are likely to deepen in the coming 15-20 years.² Secularism is unlikely to collapse not because the Congress party can revive its past glory, but because Hindu nationalists

1. M.C. Verma : *Bureaucratic Hurdles in Investments*, (New Delhi: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relation (ICRIER), 1996).
2. Satish Saberwal : *The Roots of Crisis*, (Sage, New Delhi, 1966).

have a new and vigorous political adversary: India's lower caste politicians and their platform of social justice.¹ The lower caste politicians are divided but, there appears to be an upper threshold in their internal battles. The internal divisions have not led to a wholehearted embrace of the BJP for the sake of power and to settle internal conflicts. That the BJP and the BSP could not come together after the UP elections in 1996 should indicate that ideology has become a serious element in Indian politics.² The non-ideological, purely power-based coalition-making of the 1970s and the 1980s is not over, but it appears to be in serious decline.

The upper bounds of the conflict among lower caste politicians are defined by the simple truth, that lower caste politics and Hindu nationalism are fundamentally opposed to each other. Whereas as caste politics is intra-religious, Hindu-nationalism is inter-religious. The former, emphasising of lower castes on grounds of social justice against the upper castes inevitably splits Hindu society; contrariwise, Hindu nationalism seeks to build inter-caste unity within Hinduism, wishing caste

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1. For recent debate of secularism see Sudipta Kaviraj (ed.) : *Politics of India*, (OUP, Delhi, 1997); Dipankar Gupta : "Secularisation and Minoritisation : Limit of Heroic Thought", *EPW*, (Vol. XXV, No. 35, 1995), p.2206; Partha Chatterjee : "Secularism and Toleration", *EPW*, (Vol. XXIX, No. 28, 1994), p.1773; Neera Chandhoke : *State and Civil Society*, (New Delhi, Sage Publication 1995); Stanley J. Tambiah : "The Crisis of Secularism in India", in N.G. Jayal (ed.) : *Secularism and its Critics*, (OUP, 1998); Praful Bidwai, Harbans Mukhia & Achin Vanalk (eds.) : *Religion, Religiousity and Communalism* (Delhi, Sage, 1996); Ashis Nandy : "Secularism", *Seminar* (394-June 1992), pp. 29-30; Ramesh Thakur : "Ayodhya and the Politics of India's Secularism: A Double-Standards Discourse", *Asian Survey*, (Vol. XXXIII, No. 7, July, 1993), pp. 645-664; Pradeep K. Chhibber and Subhash Misra : "Hindus and the Babri Masjid : The Sectional Basis of Communal Attitudes", *Asian Survey*, (Vol. XXXIII, No. 7, July 1993), pp. 665-672; Anirudh Deshpande : "Communalism and Secularism: Goals and Visions", *EPW*, (April 18, 1998).
 2. Sudha Pai: "From Harijans to Dalits: identity formation, political consciousness and electoral mobilisation of the schedule castes in Uttar Pradesh", in Verma (ed.) : *Schedule Caste Movement in India* (New Delhi, Vikas, 1998).

distinctions were displaced by a Hindu-Muslims cleavage. The rise of one means the loss of the other. Lower caste, not Congress politics now constitutes the biggest stumbling block for the ideological and political march of Hindu nationalism.¹ The Congress will not die. Machine parties,² first of all, rarely do, for they have a great capacity to invent the machine of patronage. Second, and more importantly, there is a huge eclectic middle in Indian politics, which does not want ideologically driven politics and sees government stability as the main goal of the political life. The Congress continues to be appealing to the eclectic middle.

In retrospect, as we look back upon the whole 20th century, we will notice that Indian politics has been dominated by what may be pronounced three "master narratives". By it is meant the major organising devices for the mass political activities, or the leading political idioms that mobilise the masses. They tell stories which make the critical issues in politics intelligible to the masses, and represent ways of putting together popular social coalitions so that political discourse can be altered and/or political power won.

In this context, the three master narratives are (1) secular nationalism, (2) religious nationalism, and (3) caste as a basis of social justice. The power of the first narrative—secular nationalism has declined, and that of the caste narrative has increased in the recent years. Religious nationalism has also

1. Rajni Kothari : "Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste", *EPW*, (June 1994), pp. 1489-1494.

2. For the elaborate meaning of the term see Richard I. Hofferbert : "Introduction: Party Structure and Party Performances in New and Old Democracies", in *Political Studies* (Vol. XLVI – Special Issue, 1998), pp. 423-431.

gone through a revival since the '80s.¹ Despite these transformations, all three narratives have, more than any other attempts at constructing politics, repeatedly generated remarkable passions in political life.² The linguistic regionalism of the '50s was satiated by the linguistic reorganisation of Indian federalism, and the narrative of Bharat versus India, which appeared to enlarge in the '80s was eclipsed by the ascendancy of Hindu nationalism and caste tensions in the late '90s. Finally, class as a basis of mass-politics could never move beyond Kerala and West Bengal. In a century long perspective class-urban-rural and linguistic distinctions appear to be a minor drama in the theatre of Indian politics.

The first master narrative, secular nationalism, is India's 'official ideology' or what Benedict Anderson would call 'official nationalism'.³ It guided the national movement and was legitimised by the country's Constitution after Independence. This narrative evokes the image of India as a family. Accordingly, all religion (as well as languages and ethnic groups) have a equal place in the national family, and as a principle, none will dominate the functioning of the state. It emphasises one's religions faith would not determine citizenship in the country and all the rights that go with it; birth in India is the sole legal

1. Ashutosh Varshney : "Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Anxiety", *Alternative* (15(5), 1992), pp. 227-261; James Chiriyankandath : "Tricolour and Saffron : Congress and the New-Hindu Challenge", in Subrata K. Mitra & James Chiriyankandath (eds.) : *Electoral Politics in India : A Changing Landscape* (Segment Books, New Delhi, 1992), pp. 55-79.

2. Ghanshyam Shah : "Grassroot Mobilisation in Indian Politics", in Atul Kohli (ed.) : *India's Democracy*, (Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1991).

3. Benedict Anderson : *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

criterion.¹ In electoral politics, the Congress party has been the prime representative of this narrative in this century. Most, though not all, political parties in India subscribe to this view of the nation, but simultaneously, they also claim that the Congress has not quite lived up to the narrative, treating, despite legal equality, some castes and religious more indulgently than other.²

Religious nationalism, the second master narrative has primarily taken two forms: Muslim and Hindu. Muslims nationalism emerged and dominated the first half of the century. It led to the birth of Pakistan in 1947. The argument for Pakistan was simply that Hindus and Muslims were not two different religious communities, but two separate nations. Hindu nationalism is the mirror image of Muslim nationalism. Hinduism, according to the Hindu nationalist narrative gives India its distinctive national identity, and other religions must assimilate to the Hindu Centre. What attracts the Hindu nationalist – the presumption about the Hindu centre of India – is precisely what repelled the Muslim nationalist.³ Whether or not Hindu can enjoy legal primacy, they must, accordingly to Hindu nationalists, have the cultural, and political primacy in shaping India's destiny. The aim of Hindu nationalist narrative is not only to emphasise the centrality of Hinduism to India, but

1. See Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (ed.) : *Nationalism, Democracy and Development* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998), especially Introduction; T.V. Sathyamurthy : "Indian Nationalism: State of the Debate", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (April 5, 1997), pp. 715-721.

2. Sham Lal, "Life and Letters: How Secular Are We?", *The Times of India* (March 2, 1985).

3. T.N. Madan : "Religion and Politics in India : Political Culture, Revivalism, Fundamentalism and Secularism", in *Contemporary India*, (New Delhi, 1997), pp. 318-336; Rajeev Bhargava : "The Secular Imperative" in S. Mukherjee & S. Ramaswamy (eds.) : *Political Science Annual 1997* (Deep & Deep, New Delhi), pp. 53-65.

also to build Hindu unity.¹ The Hindus, after all, a religious majority only in a manner of speaking. They are divided internally by multiple caste cleavages.

As a conception of the nation, religious nationalism, has been the chief competitor of secular nationalism in this century. Muslim nationalism was the *bete noire* of secular nationalists during the national movement.² Once Muslims nationalists left India for Pakistan, Hindu nationalists became the principle ideological adversary. After 1947, the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been principle patrons of religious nationalism in politics, initially supported by the Hindu Maha Sabha and recently by the Shiv Sena and Akali Dal.

The third master narrative emphasises lower caste unity, incorporating the OBCs and/or the Scheduled Caste and Tribes. Rather than nation and placement of religious or linguistic groups therein, the caste narrative speaks of the deeply hierarchical and unjust nature of the Hindu social order where upper castes have traditionally enjoyed ritualistic privileges and superior social ranks, while lower castes suffer the disadvantages of an 'unclean' status. An egalitarian restructuring of the Hindu social order is the chief goal of this caste narrative: caste should not determine whether an individual is treated as an inferior or superior human being. It also maintains that to make up for centuries of caste oppression,

1. Thomas Blom Hansen : *The Saffron Wave* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999), pp. 7-9; Sumantra Bose : "Hindu Nationalism and the Crisis of the Indian State: A Theoretical Perspective", in Bose and Jalal (ed.), *Ibid.*

2. Mushirul Hasan : *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India* (Delhi, Manohar, 1979), p. 38; Anirudh Deshpande : "Nationalism and Nation - State as Discourse in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (June 21, 1997), p. 1442.

affirmative action favouring lower castes in government jobs and education should be the primary vehicle of achieving social justice.¹ This narrative, thus, concentrates on India's religious majority – the Hindus. When it speaks of non-Hindus, it argues that both religious minorities and lower castes suffer from discrimination by higher castes. A lower castes minorities alliance, therefore, can be constructed in the politics.

The caste narrative, by and large, has risen to national prominence only of late. Successfully used to mobilise the masses in the first half of the 20th century in south India, it has extended to the north and the west today. At the present time, the primacy of caste as a narration of politics is mainly articulated by the Janata Dal, or JD-like parties (Samajwadi Party in U.P., Bahujan Samaj Party in much of the north India, DMK in Tamil Nadu, and to some extent, TDP in Andhra Pradesh). Their power in U.P., Bihar, Orissa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh is substantial and the UF government in mid-'nineties' has been essentially a representative of this narrative.

By highlighting and reviling the social hierarchy of Hinduism, the caste narrative attacks Hindu nationalism. It does not believe in Hindu unity. It is comfortable with the basic idea of secular nationalism that religion should not determine the rights and privileges of citizens. But it would add a great deal

1. Himanshu Roy : "Mandal Elite Versus Indian Democracy", in Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (eds.) : *Political Science Annual 1997*, (Deep and Deep Publication, New Delhi), pp. 76–92; N.S. Gehlot : *Indian Government and Politics* (Rawat Publications, Jaipur & New Delhi, 1995), pp. 159–185; Shiv Visvanathan : "Mandala's Mandala", *Seminar* (375), pp. 31–35; Madhu Limye : "A Democratic Weapon", *Seminar* (375), pp. 58–63; Bhikhu Parekh : "A Case for Positive Discrimination", in B. Hepple & E.M. Szyszczak (eds.) : *Discrimination: The Limits of Law* (Mansell, London & New-York, 1992); Andre Beteille : "Distributive Justice and Institutional-Well-Being", *EPW* (Vol. XXVI, nos. 11 & 12, (Annual), March 1991), pp. 591–600.

more. Disowning the metaphor of a family, it would place social justice at the heart of the politics.¹ As a corollary, it seeks to pit the lower castes against the upper castes, whereas the secular nationalist narrative would, in principle, make coalitions across upper and lower castes.²

The fact that even the historically mighty Congress party choose to be a junior partner of lower caste politicians in the politically critical state of U.P. in the 1996 elections should be an indication of which narratives are on the rise in mass politics today and are likely to so remain in the future. As a matter of fact, the Congress party today is not even the prime representative of the first narrative: it has become a symbol of governmental stability, eclecticism and patronage-based politics. No dear ideological tendency can be identified with Congress politics any more.³

That the caste narrative has become more powerful than before, however, does not mean that it has decisively won the political battles. While it has been more effective in putting political parties in power at the state-level, it has faced a great deal of difficulty in aggregating coalitions at the national-level.⁴ A nation-wide coalition, as we know, did come into being in 1989, but it collapsed within a year. So was the case with the UF government.

The biggest problems of caste narrative are internal, some of which are vertical in nature. If the calculations of the Mandal Commission are right, the OBCs alone add up to about 44% of

1 Bhikhu Parekh : "Wisdom of Caste System", *Time of India* (April 3, 1991).

2. Javed Alam : "Is Caste Appeal Casteism?: Oppressed Castes in Politics", *Economics and Political Weekly* (March 27, 1999), pp. 757-761.

3. Nikhil Chakaravarty : "From Platform to Party", *Mainstream* (March 21, 1992), p.5.

4. Radhika Ramaseshan : "Reaching Out", *Seminar* (465-May 1998), pp. 30-34.

India. As we know, the Scheduled Castes (SC) are about 15%, and the Schedule Tribes (ST) roughly 7%. There are lower castes of various kinds but there is no aggregate of lower caste community as such. Internal hierarchies exist.¹ At least in U.P., the SC politicians have openly rebelled against the leading OBC politicians.² Such vertical splits had also marked the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu earlier on in the century.

Problems of a horizontal nature also exist. Caste exist all over India, but as sociologists and anthropologists have repeatedly reminded us, they are a local or regional entity. There are upper and lower castes in all parts of the country, but the lower castes in one state may have little to do with the lower castes elsewhere. Their names, social roles, economic functions, languages and histories have local or regional meanings.³ Lower castes in other places may not have the same names nor the same histories. They are all lower castes, but in different ways. Similarly, Brahmins of the South may not be recognised as such by the Brahmins of the North and vice versa: each in their respective settings has traditionally enjoyed high status and ritual privileges but each tradition may be different.⁴ The caste narrative has a nation-wide resonance, but it has not been able to achieve a nation-wide aggregation.

At the national-level, thus, stable political coalitions representing the caste narrative may take long to form. The challenge for lower-caste based politicians is to achieve a

1. M.N. Srinivas (ed.) : *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (Penguin India, 1996), p. 39, op. cit.

2. Kanchan Chandra : "Mobilising the Excluded", *Seminar* (480- August, 1999), pp. 46-51.

3. Srinivas, *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

coalition–stability.¹ Contrariwise, not letting a coalition–unity emerge in lower caste politics is bound to be a challenge Hindu nationalists would set for themselves. By the late 1990s these two narratives may seem to ally with each other, but only under a subtle tactics of subterfuging the other’s construction from inside.² Congress will perform its eclectic balancing act – allying with one party here and another there. If the ideological charge of the caste narrative and Hindu nationalism declines, the Congress would be a great beneficiary. Given that the Congress is not longer an ideological organisation, whereas the lower caste politicians and Hindu nationalists are, the Congress will simply wait for the internal contradictions of the other two groupings to acquire embarrassing proportions.³ That will be its distinct way to make the point that only Congress can run a stable government in India. Whether this strategy will succeed remains an open question.

(II) PERSPECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL DIMENSION

Plural engagement represents a new kind of universalism – one where integration of individuals into the state is not predicated on a total disengagement from particularistic ties. Rather, people are included into the nation–state as members of diverse, but equal ethnic groups. And the state recognises that the dignity of the individuals is linked to the collective dignity of the community to which they belong.⁴ This radical redefinition of

1. A. Gajendran : “Transforming Dalit Politics”, *Seminar* (471–November, 1998), pp. 24–27.

2. Mahesh Rangarajan : “Hindutva’s accursed problem”, *Seminar* (485 January 2000) pp. 37–40; Gopal Guru : “Mapping Alliance Politics”, *The Hindu*, (December 7, 1999).

3. Rustom Bharucha : “The Shifting Sites of Secularism: Cultural Politics and Activism in India Today”, *EPW* (January 24, 1998), pp. 167–180.

4. Gurpreet Mahajan : “Rethinking Multiculturalism”, *Seminar* (484, December, 1999), pp. 56–61.

a democratic polity makes plural engagement a normative value that is applicable as much to the modern liberal democracies of the West as it is to modernising polities like India, that endeavours to initiate policies which can sustain cultural diversity and can help in the forward movement of societies by engendering a broad-based acquiescence.

In India, plural engagement started along with the inauguration of democracy. In this respect India is quite unique. While our Constitution, with great wisdom, and foresight allowed for judicious balance between unity, and diversity, so that the nation has managed to persist for five decades as a territorially intact and moderately successful polity.¹ However, the political context in which the Constitution was drafted has altered considerably today. The Constitution presupposed a much higher rates of economic growth, and a much greater equitable distribution of resources among the diverse communities than has proved to be the case. It took full account of religious and a rather limited account of cultural diversity, but none of the ethnic self assertion. The constitutional emphasis on inter-group equality special consideration for segregated communities, and minorities, but it left the agenda of intra-group equality unattended. Consequently, cultural community rights could be appropriated to protect the structure of domination and patriarchy.² Assuming paradoxically, that India has minorities but not a majority, it sought to nurture the former's self-expression and allowed the minorities to act as collective agents while ignoring the real and fraught probability of the majority becoming integrated and acting as a collective subject. It also assumed a culturally neutral and socially transcendental state,

1. Mohit Battacharya : "The Mind of the Founding Fathers", in Nirmal Mukerji and Balveen Arora, ed. : *Federalism in India* (Vikas, 1992).

2. James Chiriyankandath : "Constitutional Predilections", *Seminar* (484, December, 1999), pp. 50-55.

able to ensure political impartiality, and did not anticipate that a determined majority might culturally monopolise the state and use it to enforce a narrow vision of India.¹ Besides, in the context of an underdeveloped economy where resources are few and the claims on them many, and from diverse quarters, collective identities are often mobilised for political and economic gains. That is why identities have taken on a very potent form in which the concern of plural engagement have been transformed into policies of containment and appeasement, paradoxically.²

Angulating plural engagement to the notion of 'federalism', it becomes a pre-requisite for managing the ever new stages of nation-building through a balanced, and mutually reinforcing system of the national, and regional governments. Such an observation is particularly relevant to a continental federation of India's dimension that faces severe problems of federal nation-building.³ The need for a strong Centre ensuring the basic need of national unity, at the same time, attending to the compulsions of multiple diversities and pluralities needed to be continuously reconciled, and woven in a well-knit relationship between different levels of its political system. On the whole, federal nation-building keeps in view the consensual and constitutional constraints of federalism, (which are inherent in a large democracy with its "underdeveloped" mass that has to build a

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1. Sarah Joseph : "Of Minorities and Majorities", *Seminar* (484, December, 1999), pp. 30-34.
 2. Neera Chandhoke : "The Logic of Recognition", *Seminar* (484, December, 1999), pp. 35-39; Rashiddudin Khan : *Bewildered India: Identity, Pluralism, Discord* (New Delhi: Har Ananad, 1994); P.S. Datta : *Ethnic Peace Accords in India* (Vikas: 1995).
 3. Ashis Banerji : "Federalism and Nationalism", In Nirmal Mukerji and Balveer Arora (eds.), op. cit. See Balveer Arora : "Multiple Identities and Diverse Majorities : India's Federal Democracy", *Conference on Democracy and Federalism* (All Souls' College, Oxford, 8-7 June, 1997 (processed)); "Indian Federal System and the Demands of Pluralism: Crisis and Reform in the Eighties" in J. Chaudhuri ed. : *India's Beleaguered Federalism: The Pluralist Challenge* (Arizona State University Press, 1992), pp. 5-25.

strong modern state in as a "multi-nationality" society) as the basic premise on which the ongoing federalising process should develop.¹

Coalition politics, in this context, appears to be the positive phase in the democratic development. Even when each component in itself is a minority, the coalition front gets a majority which represents a multiple number of people and their varied interests.² Theoretically, Robert Dahl finds an "attenuation of majority rule" in this transition.³ Polyarchy, in essence, therefore differs from the conventional democracies where democracy is often taken for sheer majoritarianism, adumbrating alongwith, that a dispersed legislature need not to be necessarily a hung legislature, the former being the erroneous phrase fundamentally. Polyarchy in itself is a positive development and according to Dahl, it has succeeded to a good extent in Modern Dynamic Pluralist Societies (MDP Societies). To quote Dahl:

"What is crucial about an MDP society is that on the one hand it inhibits the concentration of power in any single unified set of actors, and on the other it disperses power among a number of relatively independent actors. Because of their power and autonomy, the actors can resist unilateral domination, compete with one another for advantages engage in conflict and bargaining and pursue independent actions of their own.

1. Amaresh Bagchi : "Rethinking Federalism : Overview of Current Debates with some Reflections in Indian Context", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Vol. XXXV, No. 34, August 19-25, 2000), pp. 3025-3036.

2. Balveer Arora : "Negotiating Differences: The Challenge of Federal Coalitions", *Denouncement* (New Delhi, Vol. 9, Jan. - Feb., 1999). Also see Alfred Stephan: "Democracy and Federalism", *Seminar* (November, 1997).

3. Robert Dahl : *Democracy and its Critics* (Orient Longman, India, reprint, 1991).

Characteristics of an MDP society is a dispersion of political resources such as money, knowledge, status, and access to organisations, of strategic locations, particularly in economic, scientific, educational and cultural affairs; and of bargaining positions, both overt and latent in economic affairs, science, communications, education and elsewhere.”¹

Notwithstanding the pluralist characteristics, Indian society is neither modern nor dynamic, on account of the historical and economic limitations imposed by colonialism and the feudal agrarian background. Dahl himself is of the view that India is the “leading contemporary exception to the general relationship between Polyarchy and MDP society.” But it would appear that along with some leaders in India, he also share a general euphoria when he says that: “..... the extraordinary number of subcultures (in India) formed by language caste, region, religion makes it impossible for any one of them or even a coalition among a few, to win elections, much less to govern. Party leaders are therefore powerfully motivated to shape policies, programmes and propaganda that will appeal to the voters across a broad spectrum of subcultures. As a result, subculture conflict have not destroyed polyarchy in India, though they constantly endanger its survival.”²

Now, before dwelling on various demands of the federal process that confronts India in the current phase of coalition politics, a synoptic review of the past current will help us to gauge its problems and prospects. In this context the federal domain that changed its patterns, may broadly be characterised as under:

1 Ibid p 252

2 Ibid., p. 260

- (i) **Subdued federalism (1950-56):** Owing to the dominance of unified national leadership of Congress; historical hangover of partition; one-party dominance and centrally focussed planning.
- (ii) **Emergent federalism (1956-63):** So characterised by the rise of state Congress leadership with autonomous basis in regional-linguistic aspiration and dominant caste groups.
- (iii) **Balanced federalism:** When during 1964-67 the state Congress bosses had attained critical say in the making of the P.M. the head of the Union Government. The earlier roles of the P.M. and CMs were then reversed in a way.
- (iv) **Conflicting federalism (1967-70):** When the non-Congress governments in eight important states confronted the Central Government on issues of finance and the role of the Governor, etc. The Centre-state relationship became embittered and embattled.
- (v) **Re-establishment of subdued federalism:** With the return of the dominant party system in the polls of 1971 and 1972 around the personality of a centralist Prime Minister.
- (vi) **Unitarist federalism during the Emergency (1975-77):** The Emergency threw up a new ruling elite which transformed the centralisation of authority into authoritarianism of the Centre whose basis became narrow. Alienated from the large

masses such a unitarist policy proved to be anti democratic. The *de-facto* centralist features were then formalised through highly controversial 42nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution in 1976.

- (vii) **Co-operative federalism (1977-79):** It lasted during the Janata phase (1977-79).
- (viii) **Re-establishment of subdued but uneasy federalism (1980-89):** This became dominant with the re-emergence of Congress (I).
- (ix) **Co-operative federalism (1989-91):** Like phase (vii) of the Janata party, Janata Dal (JD) was also explicitly committed to genuine federalism.
- (x) **Functioning federalism (1991-95):** With the Union Government not quite strong, Mr. Rao tried to keep non- BJP government in states in good humour.
- (xi) **State-centric regionalised federalism (1996-):** The curtain has still to fall on this aspect of our federalism.

The complexity of India gave our Constitution a federal appearance, though with a pronounced unitary character. Continuance of West-minister model in our highly plural society led to increasing resort to coalition governments as the dominant national party declined eventually, and the governance system was not conducive to emergence of a coherent political party structure. Federalism has to be examined from various angles. The political role the constituent states in shaping their own governing structure is important in a truly federal polity. In India, given the stultifying uniformity prescribed by the

Constitution, various laws and executive orders, the rich diversity of the Indian Union is not reflected in the design of the political structure of the constituent states. The fiscal devolution is not commensurate with the enormous tasks for governance and providing services including education and health care that the states are entrusted with. Over the years, however, the states are reasonably free to frame their own policies, the mechanism of the Planning Commission and the centrally sponsored schemes made sure that room for manoeuvring is very limited.¹

The problems of flawed federalism have been complicated in 1990s, given the non-emergence of a competitive bi-polar coalition model. The presence and activism of parties and social forces with conflicting nature of extreme right, centre and left plus the regional, sub-regional, communal and casteist formations at macro and micro levels constrain trends in political polarisation. The vacuum created by the decline of 'one party dominance' in more apparent today. Conversely these developments created a deep impact on Indian federalism.² The opinions never converge on the issue whether the developments would strengthen or weaken the federal system.

In the wake of the shift towards neo-liberal agenda since 1991, the misadventure of coalition politics by major political formations, and the rise of a new social base from rural India challenging both the traditional Brahminical and middle caste orthodoxy certainly created an uneven impact on federal

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- 1 See Ajit Mazoomdar : "The Political Economy of Modern Federalism", in Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney (eds.) : *Multiple Identities in a Single State* (Konark, 1995); S. Guhan : "Federalism and the New Political Economy in India" in Arora and Verney (ed.); Guljit K. Arora : "Fiscal Federation in India: Retrospect and Prospect I & II", *Mainstream* (October 19, & 26, 1996).
 2. M.P. Singh and Rekha Saxena : "Recent Trends in the Indian Party System", *Journal of Government and Political Studies* (Vol. XV, No.1, September, 1996).

democracy in India.¹ For some time now, there have been no national mandates in our parliamentary elections and the national verdict is merely an aggregate of the state mandates. The electoral verdicts at the state-level in turn have been largely plebiscitary in nature, and in most case motivated by a strong anti-incumbency sentiment. This process is further complicated by the increasing caste and sub-caste consciousness in peoples' voting patterns as well as in the state's decision making.² Such sectarian political loyalties translated themselves into a large immobile votes in many states. The shifting vote, based on the voters perception of a party's performance or promise, which is so crucial in the electoral outcomes of a party is slowly disappearing in India.³

As a result, at the national-level the electoral outcomes are fairly predictable and persistently indecisive, leading to unsuitable, weak and often-incoherent coalitions based on the number game.⁴ In the states where caste divisions are kept under some check for historical reasons, there have been decisive mandates mostly based on anti-incumbency feeling, with the two major parties or combinations sharing power alternatively with almost unfailing regularity. Where there is a high congruence between caste and political preference, and where a majority combination has not emerged to acquire a decisive edge, there is a persistent political stalemate with farcical consequences. The third, as yet incipient, outcome is the

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1. G. Gopakumar : "Fragmented Party System and Indian Federalism", *Politics India* (June 1998).
 2. Jayed Alam : "Nation and the Regions", *Seminar* (454, June 1997).
 3. Jayaprakash Narayan : "Federalism and Coalition Governments: The Indian Experience", *Politics India* (January, 1998).
 4. Kanchan Gupta : "Federal Anarchy", *Seminar* (454, June 1997); see for details: Zoya Hasan, S.N. Jha and Rasheeduddin Khan (eds). : *The State, Political Process and Identity: Reflections on Modern India* (N. Delhi, Sage Publications, 1989) particularly, pp. 73-88 and 99-112.

emergence of a strong unbeatable, almost permanent majority combination of castes and communities with a stranglehold over the electorate.¹

Now, the relevance of regional parties in strengthening federalism has to be properly analysed from this context. Though, with the decline of the Congress party, regional forces have become very powerful in India and since 1989 the formation and continuance of governments in Delhi increasingly depend on the bargains struck between national and regional political parties. However, economically speaking, federalism in India has not been a great successes, with state governments showing remarkably little inclination for policy innovation.² This is because the policies and programmes of regional parties have been hardly connected to the question of economic reform, and the issue of federal coalition politics remained non-addressed in terms of the economic imperatives. If the programmes of the TMC, DMK, TDP or AGP are examined, it would be sterile in terms of economic theory and practice speaking only anti-Congressism and anti-BJPism.³

Moreover, the current convulsions in the affairs of states have thrown up two worrisome features—one, a fillip to pretence politics, and two, a disproportionately high weightage to the states in the decision making-process at the national-level. Democratic centralism of the Congress system was an artificial situation and the imbalance needed to be rectified. But, with the onset of the coalition era, the pendulum has swung to the other

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1. James Manor: "Regional Parties in Federal System", in Arora and Verney (ed.); M.P. Singh : "Emergence of State Based Political Parties: Implications for Indian Federalism", *Politics India* (September, 1996).
 2. Myron Weiner : "The Regionalisation of Indian Politics and its Implications for Economic Reforms" in Sachs, Varshney & Bajpai (eds).
 3. Balveer Arora : *Economic Reforms, the Role of states and the Future of Centre-State Relations*, (N Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 1996).

extreme.¹ The Central leadership in most cases has given in to the short-term compulsions and exigencies of the states. This was evident from the working of the coalitions led by Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda and Mr. I.K. Gujral, as also the first BJP-led coalition under Mr. A.B. Vajpayee. The present set up, too, is vulnerable to pressures from the states (through the various constituents or otherwise). Whether it is the BJP, leading constituent of the coalition or the Congress main opposition, state-level exigencies and pressures tend to force compromises, often unsound and unprincipled.

No federal party can attain legitimacy unless it moulds a strategy for radical changes in the areas of land, education and public distribution systems at the state-level.² However, the ad-hoc attitude towards forging coalitions at the national-level due to the logic of power maximisation of patronage politics, precludes any creation of model economic set-up in their respective states by the regional parties, and so their claim for power at the Centre does not attain legitimacy. Yet, the states are heavily influencing the course of events at the Centre even against its better judgement.³ This is no transitory phenomenon and will need to be factored in, whenever major changes are in offing, but given the unstructured nature of coalition politics, it may not be easy. If this trend catches on, plural orderliness would be a major casualty in an environment where federal principle – “the different advantages of the magnitude and littleness of nations” (in Tocqueville’s celebrated words), would have ceased to matter.

1. K.K. Katyal : “Pretence and Compromises”, *The Hindu* (Feb. 12, 2001).

2. Douglas V. Verney : “Responsible Government and Responsible Federalism: Parliamentary Government in Plural Societies”, *Typescript* (York University, Toronto, 1990).

3. M.P. Singh : “Coalition/Minority Governments and Federalisation in India”, in *Political Science Annual 1997* (Deep and Deep Publication, N. Delhi, 1992).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The crisis of coalition governance in a developing democracy can be analysed from a political-sociological perspective, or from a standpoint that emphasises the roles of the government and politics. If the primordial consideration of such a study were to select between these theoretical alternates, synoptic evidence from the complex Indian case could indeed be discovered to advocate either one. However, when the basic purpose is to solve an empirical quiz, as is the case of this study, there is no rationale to exclude significant theoretical insight from any quarter.

A focus on the interactions between government and society provides a synthetic theoretical framework. Social structures undergoing transitions typically are afflicted with atrophic processes due to the incapacity of the traditional belief system to legitimise the emergent socio-economic hierarchies. Hence, issues of transforming values and novel patterns of stratification, including rise of class conflict, are important for comprehending a situation of growing overall tension. The social mobilisation that results from institutional capacities to aggregate accommodation, thus contributes to coalition 'blues'.

Political variables make additional, autonomous contributions to the emergence of this atrophy. The question of governmental legitimacy is only partially a function of socio-economic conditions. Numerous political considerations also influence whether or not a coalition will be deemed functionally legitimate. The government's pervasive presence, further tends to enhance the significance of politics, and thus the political variables in developing Third world countries. Finally, the quality

of the political leadership is also of enormous significance in either governing or mitigating problems of coalition regimes.

The heuristic analysis carried out in this study has been guided by these fairly general government-society considerations. Beginning with the assumption that political structures and processes enjoy a degree of autonomy from the social structure. The government can influence socio-economic changes, and moreover, power struggles are not reducible to socio-economic struggles. Conversely, it would be absurd to under-emphasise the significant impact that cultural and class variables have on a society's politics. The task of this analysis within a government-society framework has been to assess how, and in what proportions these competing variables mix.

The new phase of politics in the 1990s, where rainbow coalitions within parties are breaking down, and where parties with narrower social bases have come to have say in the national politics, out of proportion to their national appeal, points to a paradox. While in most democracies, parties at the either end of the ideological spectrum gravitate to the centre, parties in India seem to be vacating the middle ground of politics. Whether this is by choice, or, as in the case of the BJP, through its politics of militant Hinduism, or by compulsions in the case of the Congress, due to the migration of its social base of Muslims and Dalits, remains to be analysed. But what is clear is that the rise of more assertive ethnic, and regional groups has made the task of consensus-building, on the platform of national politics of the old kind, more difficult to sustain.

Three interpretations can be suggested for this new political trend. The first is that the polity is going through an ideological upheaval, brought about by the empowerment of the citizens through the tool of political socialisation, that has

converted latent social identities, necessarily local, into active political ones. Accordingly, the vacating of the central political ground is only transitional, which will over time, return the national polity to the pragmatic tradition, as groups learn to negotiate their postures from unstable to stable, and enduring coalitions. Pragmatism here becomes an ideology creating over time the requisite procedures of political negotiations. Perhaps a charismatic leadership will be required to lend credibility to this exercise of forging national consensus. This may happen since it can be argued that the polity is suffering from a charisma deficit. The second interpretation is that the current fractured state of affairs is going to be the more permanent state of politics, where there will be shifting coalitions at the national level, negotiated either before, or after each election. The ideological inclination of the voter will as a result, paradoxically get translated into a pragmatism of the elected, that will yield a different verdict at the state level where, in contrast to the Union level, the parties continue to occupy the middle ground. Charisma in this case exist at the state-level, and not at the national-level. The interpretation of this political phase is that the polity is moving towards the point of no return-of fragmentation. The third interpretation, which has found favour among doomsday theorists, is born out of a deficient perspective of Indian politics. Hence, which of the first two interpretations proves correct remains to be seen. The Italian experience may perhaps offer us some clues.

Turning our attention to some of the more general paradoxes, resultant of the changed political patterns of the 1990s, they point to some of the difficult choices that the historical project of democracy encounters today, choices often between two options, both of which are desirable, and require a

politically imaginative response, which retains the gains of the democratic project, while simultaneously, constraining its negative consequences.

The major paradox encountered, is apropos the aspect of power. Democratic theory, in both its classical and realistic variants, upholds that democracy is superior to the other forms of government since it makes power accountable. While this proposition holds true over the long run ; over the short term, this is not the case, as democracy actually creates new and additional spaces of unaccountable power. This is particularly true in India, where, new leaders and representatives enter the political arena, through elections, that provides them either social and/or political power, which they often utilise to further their own personal interests. The scale to which corruption has grown is indicative of this creation of new spaces of unaccountable power. The corrupt representatives bank on three features of Indian democracy, which gives them courage to be so brazen. The first is the time-frame between elections that is long enough for them to amass a fortune. The second is the short memory of the voter, and the ability of the representative of manipulate this memory by reference to caste or community or other symbols of ethnic identity. The manner in which this is accomplished is area worth of study. The third is the ineffectiveness of the penalty-awarding institutions of the polity.

This state of affairs presents us with a clear paradox. On the one hand, we have the faith of the voters in the political system, as expressed in the increasing voter turnout, and on the other hand, we have the same voter expressing the opinion that 'representatives do not care for the people'. This shows both the importance of elections to the voters, as an avenue of settling disputes and for bringing important issues on to the political

agenda, and also its ineffectiveness in delivering on this expectation. Perhaps there is a measure of truth to Pareto's thesis of history that irrespective of which form of political system one adopts, history will continue to remain a graveyard of aristocracies.

Another paradox, related to the first, pertains to the new political leadership that has come to take control of national politics. For Indian democracy to expand, it needs to induct new leaders at different levels into the political domain that helps in not only mobilising citizenry, but also in making the bargaining process more representative. New leaders enter the system, and soon begin to change the vocabulary of political discourse. Since their interest is local, and of short term, they are unable to support policies, which provide benefits over the long term, and to the larger community. Also, they have less patience with the rules of the public institutions, and hence in the celebrated phrase of the emerging era, for them the State becomes private property. As a result of this numerical uprise of political leaders, and their non-adherence to the cultural, and formal rules of democratic procedure, democracy itself gets enfeebled. Hence, the larger the number of leaders, the wider the democracy, but also the greater the probability of its enfeeblement.

The above trends, and paradoxes lead towards the most important question confronting contemporary India. It is the question of 'negotiating the terms of the political community'. The history and the sociology of this negotiation needs to be understood. What we have been witnessing in the 1990s is this process of negotiation. A large number of groups with multiple agendas, are involved in this negotiation. Each employing a range of strategies, and shifts between possible relationships of competition, co-operation, and conflict in dealing with the other

groups. Unpacking this negotiating process, its constraints, and communication levels, is what must be done by those who wish to understand Indian democratic political metamorphosis. It will illuminate the relative roles of leaders, groups, institutions, and processes in the making of the emerging political community. Each of these has a contribution to make in both proactive and reactive terms, in determining its boundaries, and the intrinsic configuration. India today can be visualised as being poised at a historical juncture, where the redefinition of the nation will thus, hinge upon what political choices these various political agents will ultimately make.

The study of coalition politics in the three states, in the mode of comparative analysis has helped in delineating the causes, and consequences of the political change. Of the three states analysed, the crisis is most severe in U.P. There is a qualitative different type of turmoil in Maharashtra. By contrast, coalition in West Bengal is showing little bit of it, after a considerable time-period. How does one explain this regional diversity?

The negative conclusions which emerge from this comparative analysis are as important as the positive ones. Clearly, for instance, problems of coalitions do not correlate in any simple way with levels of economic development. Evidently, small variations in development levels do not provide any ready insights into the process of exercising authority in coalition arrangement. Another negative conclusion emerges from these materials: i.e., it is best not to conceptualise the problems of coalition in India as northern problems rather than southern problems. Studies have contrasted U.P. with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and concluded that the early success of the anti-Brahminical movement in the South may provide one part of the

explanation why politics in some southern states is more accommodative, apparently. There is some merit in this proposition, but more important is the underlying explanatory issue, which suggests that failure to accommodate challenges to the power from below is at the root of coalition turmoil. This proposition also needs qualification that will be considered little later.

The variables that seem to explain best the relative order and disorder in coalitions in certain Indian states are the nature of party organisation, and the patterns of power distribution. The variable of party organisation is relatively easy to understand. An well-organised party can fill the authority-vacuum created by competitive political mobilisation. Such a ruling party can minimise factional conflicts, clarify lines of authority, define policy priorities, and impart a degree of cohesiveness, and effectiveness to a government. Powerful and competent leaders can also provide a temporary functional equivalent to a strong party. By contrast, the highly factionalist and organisationally weak parties have been a major factor in the surmounting civil turmoil, not only in U.P., but also in Maharashtra.

The issue of how patterns of power distribution makes problematic any coalition is more complex. Political power in U.P., for example, has traditionally been in the hands of the high castes, and as this power is challenged, there are major sources of coalition turmoil. In contrast, control over the state apparatus is both West Bengal and Maharashtra has been wrenched out of the hands of the dominant socio-economic groups. Again, however, the political consequences have been different. Maharashtra became the scene of periodic turmoil, whereas relative order was maintained in West Bengal. Clearly any single hypothesis tracing the roots of stable and effective coalition back

either to elite rule, or to more egalitarian power distribution will not be suffice.

There are, however, two alternative hypotheses relating power distribution of coalition that are consistent with these comparative findings for various states. First, as long as the dominant position of the land-owning high status groups remains more or less unchallenged in the rural social structure, state control by these dominant groups is likely to yield stable government. Lest the hypothesis appear to be a tautology, it is important to point out that it is the traditional authority in the civil society, not rational-legal authority in a distinct political arena, that is the source of coalition instability in such cases. Those who are readily accepted as community leaders can, in such cases, double up as political leaders, imparting a degree of legitimacy, and stability to coalition.

The numerical power has increasingly come to be pitted against the power derived from wealth, and high social status. The elite-versus-mass power conflicts, with multiple variations in terms of the actors involved, the strategies applied, and the outcomes, have been important in the political life of these three states. In both U.P. and Maharashtra, this conflict has led to acute problems for those attempting to maintain effective coalition. For example, the power of land-owning castes in U.P. is deeply entrenched. The mobilisation of the SCs, and sub-castes has been a product of desperation born of scarcity. It has also been poorly organised. Such mobilisation efforts threaten the existing power structure, but only weakly, sensing which, and utilising the tools of socio-cultural hegemony, higher castes have return back to their privileged positions in both the state and society.

The pattern of conflict in Maharashtra has been somewhat different. Members of numerically sizeable intermediate castes have displaced the regions dominant castes from the state offices. However, periodic riots and violence cited by the dominant caste on the lines of Hindutva and regional identity clearly limited the domain of coalition, in the direction of improving the socio-economic conditions of the intermediate and lower castes.

West Bengal provides a somewhat different case. The combined numbers of the mobilised middle and lower classes have enabled a left-of-centre party, the CPM, to sustain political power. Unlike the case of Maharashtra, the party's disciplined structure has made it difficult for powerful socio-economic groups to reduce the rulers to token status. But, it brings out another fact as well, one-sided electoral contest in long run delegitimises the ruling coalition, as it increasingly becomes impervious to the popular aspirations, resulting in an onset of anti-incumbency factor, which ironically, is not generally built on rational choice.

A second important hypothesis emerges from these state-level observations. As the traditional dominance patterns erode, and various types of elite-mass conflicts emerge, stable coalition outcome will increasingly require political incorporation of the newly mobilised lower-strata. A well organised party is one mechanism for incorporating the poor. There are other political arrangements, that could be used to facilitate such induction. Irrespective of the specifics, the leaders, and the institutions that can assist re-establishing stable, effective coalition will have something in common. Simultaneously, they will have to respect the rights of propertied groups, and avoid "inefficient egalitarianism", on the one hand, and generate both symbolic and real gains for the bottom half of the Indian society, on the other.

Coming to the coalitions at the Centre, they point to a fundamental reworking of the Indian politics, along with its social basis. The four decades of the Congress system in one form or the other were characterised by political mobilisation that cut across fundamental social cleavages. In its various incarnations and local variants, the rainbow social coalition of the Congress party did not include all sections quite equally. But it did follow anyone fault-line of the society. The decline of Congress and the rise of the BJP to the power created the possibility of a new kind of cleavages based on caste and class. It is not caste-based, or class-based in any simple sense: it is woven around the ideology of nationalism, and invokes a reworking of *Jati* and sectional divisions. Nonetheless, it is constructed around a "master cleavage" of class-caste privileges. Its end product is a new social bloc, one with soft edges and blurred boundaries. Verdict '99 marks the arrival of this new block.

To be sure, the arrival does not guarantee its durability or even survival, let alone its continued electoral success. The new social bloc is still quite fragile, and yet to gel. In more than one way, it is a very artificial product, more a result of a highly skilful working of the logic of the electoral system, and caste-community configurations in their regional setting by the BJP leadership, than a harmonious convergence, and confluence of various groups. There is a definite tension among the social profiles of the BJP and its allies. But at present-it helps the party bring groups to its new social bloc that would not have otherwise come its way. It is unclear how well the BJP will be able to manage this tension. It is also not clear if the party will succeed in mobilising enough numbers from outside this group, so as to ensure the creation of an electoral majority out of a numerical minority.

Naturally, this begs the question: If the privileged can form a bloc, why not the underprivileged at the Centre? Do the recent elections and political indices point in that direction? In a sense, the downfall of the "catch all" Congress umbrella opened up the potentiality of the political consolidation of the underprivileged, as it did for the privileged. The 1990s have enriched this possibility, for we have witnessed a participatory upsurge of the lower social orders. One need to take note of the extraordinary fact that India is perhaps the only contemporary democracy where the impoverished and socially deprived participate in politics more than the elite.

At the same time, various factors have worked against the realisation of this potential, and resulted in the fragmentation of what could have been a counter-bloc. First, it is always more arduous to consolidate the underprivileged, for their access to information and action is minuscule. Secondly, the regionalist nature of our polity works against the coming together of these sections on a single national political podium, leaving it open for the BJP to incorporate a group like Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) through localised negotiations and bargaining. Finally, the absence of an organised party- political nucleus that would initiate such a consolidation prevents the potential from turning into reality.

Can Congress-I perform that task? On the face of it, after all, the party that gets the largest support from the underprivileged. At the same time, we need to remember that there is a residual quality to the party's vote. The social support it gets is more often than not merely the mirror image of the social profile of its opponent, getting the votes of the lower strata more by default than by design. The creation of a counter-bloc of the underprivileged would need more than a happy coincidence.

It would require a painstaking building of social alliances and political coalitions, within or without the party. It would also require forging a new vision, and overhauling the organisation to allow it to act as the vehicle of this historical process. For the existing Congress party, it is a very tall order indeed.

Viewed from the positive angle, the coalitions at the Centre, have been indicative of the gradual emergence, and progress towards the consolidation of two conditions necessary for stable coalition-rule. One, coalition partners reach a prior agreement on common programmes, and on mechanisms for conflict resolution. Two, they have non-overlapping, well-delimited social-geographical bases and agreement on some ground rules, for example, not poaching upon one another's territory. Thus, Italy's fifty-plus coalitions are not stable because there is no prior programmatic agreement, and a great deal of post-election haggling, while Holland's or Sweden's coalitions are stable precisely because there is a prior negotiation. Where independent class-based parties exist, they can negotiate with each other exactly, since their bases do not overlap beyond a point and are complementary. In India, we are already approaching the second condition, and the first could be fulfilled, if our political leaders summon up the will, and reorient their political cognition and behaviour, conditioned to a bygone dominant party system, to the political trend, an offshoot of the social churning in vogue.

Apropos the issue of governance and the outcome and impact of coalition on our polity, the analysis has focused on three areas: (a) the nature of formal political, institutional structures and processes ; (b) the overall orientation of the economic policy matters; and (c) the efficiency to accommodate political interests, and disputes within the political order

mapping the architectonic narratives in plural engagement, evaluating the ideology and politics of the coalition-rule's project of governance in terms of its implications for the role of the State, the political process and the issues of democracy and development.

Instead of attacking these complex issues head on, an indirect research strategy has been applied, studying how coalition/minority regimes sought to deal with their own definitions of priority problems during their tenures. Clearly, these foci are selective, not accounting for all the nuances. However, observing coalition in action in these broadly significant aspects provided a sample microcosm of the coalition era of the 1990s, in terms of goals and performances. In this context, certain perceptual changes that occurred in the 1990s have affected political structure to the point of exhaustion representing a "crisis". Both on parameters of performance, and equity, the record of our institutions remained dismal. It is not appropriate to say that the 'crisis' of constitutionalism and the erosion of institutional norms in India have, indeed, become routine. However, it has not been easy to map. A single canonical model is of little utility, hence, this thesis has worked towards a context-sensitive understanding of institutional working, or lack of it, but simultaneously, recognising their autonomy in the context of globalisation and economic liberalisation.

For that purpose, topics have been located in such an analytical frame, that has helped in discerning certain enduring social structures, which continue to circumscribe our choices collectively, and the extent to which political institutions have been able to combine two modes of action, i.e., doing things the right way, and getting things done, containing features such as

generalised trust, norms and civic activities. Areas analysed are the constitutional review in turbulent times; altering contours of the executive authority of the President, perplexing complexity bereft collective responsibility of the P.M. and the cabinet; growing devaluation of the Parliament and the state assemblies, judicial activism, questionable decision-making of the governors, excruciatingly complex job of the C.M.; and partisan and self-serving bureaucracy.

The political economy section has analysed the political underpinnings of the economic policies carried out throughout the 1990s accounting for various political changes within India that created the precondition for a shift in the development strategy. Whether these changes were solely in the ideological realm, or they also reflect a shifting balance of power among contending political actors, and why has the pace of the reform been slow, piecemeal, and even hesitant? In an attempt to answer these queries, the recent role of the political elites, and various interest groups involved in the country's macroeconomic policy making has been analysed, framed in the theoretical perspectives of two points : (a) mass politics *vs.* elite politics, and (b) ideology *vs.* pragmatism.

It has been discovered that policy changes encountered opposition, with opposing forces being present in more than one stage of the policy process, depending on their power position. Those in possession of structural power/control over outcome tried to influence decisions at an earlier stage, but many safeguarded their interests by not responding in desired way to the decision and implementation processes, while being unable to influence the eventual outcome. Proponents and opponents can be located within the decision-making structure, who also alternatively sought to influence the process from the outside.

Consequently, the policy process has been as interactive process, which also worked in form of feedback mechanisms and attempts at pre-emptive reactions in one phase anticipating problem in a later stage of the process. Methods for influencing policies are manifold, but can be classified broadly as bureaucratic and public.

Though Indian governments since 1991 have demonstrated a pragmatic, 'one-step-here-and-two-steps there' approach towards the economic reforms, a full blown, systematic rationale for why India needs reforms has not been boldly articulated in politics. Reforms have been debated in the English language press, in Parliament and in elite forum of discussion, but even though India passed through five general elections in this 'nineties' decade, reforms have not been thrust into electoral politics as a major issue by any political party, including the Congress that initiated them. Instead, the electoral agenda has been dominated by secular versus religious politics, affirmative action, corruption, and personalities. Drawing distinction between elite politics and mass politics, although most reforms can be shown to have relevance for mass welfare, some policies, for example, capital market reforms directly concerns only upper strata in India whereas, such as labour market and agricultural reforms touch upon mass welfare directly and in short-run. The latter can be politically risky in an adversarial democracy as opposition parties organise to confront the government on behalf of the short-run losers. Indian coalition governments since 1991 have gone for the less risky and relatively safer reforms, reforms that primarily affect elite welfare, while leaving reforms more relevant to the masses relatively untouched. The political logic induced by explosion of communal passions gave the reformers room to push reforms.

The same logic has also come to define the limits of economic reforms. Afraid that masses and their own party cadres or supporters might turn against them, India's reformers have so far failed to privatise public sector, restructure public laws, introduce agricultural reforms and reduce fiscal deficits adequately. By affecting very large numbers of people directly these policy initiatives can potentially focus opposition's effort on the entire reform programme, bringing it is mass politics. *Ex ante*, without adequate ideological campaign and preparation, insertion of reforms in mass politics can have radically uncertain political consequences.

Case of architectonic narratives in contest, and plural engagements in the federal dimension has been discussed under the heading of political culture of coalition politics of the 1990s, taking a synoptic view of post-colonial trajectories of democracy in India, accounting for the changing structure of competing discourses and the simultaneous process of social antagonisms and power polarisation, that consequently have severely challenged the traditional authority patterns, that in turn explain an array of tendencies, punctuated by coalitional instability, and substantial fluctuations in the 'political mood' of the electorate. The triangular contest of master narratives, which have fundamentally challenged, and to a great extent altered the pillars of post-independent India, comprises of (a) secular nationalism, (b) religious nationalism, and (c) caste as the basis of social justice. In recent years, the political mobilisation of lower castes is undermining, perhaps decisively, the traditional caste hierarchy, and the secular political order has been mightily challenged by Hindu nationalism. All these trends are likely to deepen in the coming years. Secularism is unlikely to collapse because Hindu nationalists have a new and vigorous political

adversary: lower caste politicians and their platform of social justice, and not because Congress party can revive its past glory.

Further, in the context of federalising process of creating a strong "multi-nationality" society, coalition politics appears to be a positive development. But, on the account of the historical and economic limitations imposed by colonialism and the feudal agrarian background, there has been ad-hoc attitude towards forging coalitions at the national-level. As a result, all politics and governance through coalition have been reduce to a zero-sum game, and instead of creating win-win situation by pursuing balanced policies, a counter productive attitude has come to stay. This is also because the policies and programmes of regional parties have been hardly related to the question of economic reforms, practising only anti-Congressism and anti-BJPism, alternatively. Moreover, due to the logic of power-maximisation of patronage politics, regional parties have failed to create model economic set-up in their respective states, hindering second generation economic reforms. Yet, they are increasingly influencing the course of events at the Centre, against its better judgement, providing along, a fillip to pretence politics, that tends to coerce compromises, often unsound and unprincipled when measured within federal parameters.

Now, with the reference to the materials analysed in this study, let us imagine an analytic conversation. If one asked Robert Dahl, the world's leading democratic theorist since the Second World War, what he thought of Indian democracy today, and what would he say? What do five Indian elections in ten years since 1989 and their content illustrate, symbolise or show?

Dahl would argue that India has become a mature democracy, though he would add that it has room for greater maturity. Stated differently, India's democracy is deeper than it

used to be, but several democratic battles remain. On what basis can we say that it is deeper? And why it is unfinished?

India's democracy is deeper because it satisfies, more than ever before, two principal criteria of democratic theory: contestation, and participation. Contestation means the freedom with which those in power are challenged in elections; and participation indicates how large a segment of the nation's population takes part in elections, and especially the previously excluded do.

Let us first look at contestation in India. In the last ten years, India has had five national elections and government has changed hands four times: 1989, 1991, 1996 and 1998. In the 1999 elections the incumbents have won for the first time since 1989, but that is only the visible tip of the iceberg. As we dig deeper, we find that more than fifty percent incumbents 276 out of 541— lost their seats. Such results are impossible unless contestation is remarkably free.

What about participation? Despite the widespread prediction of voter apathy, the third election in three years registered a 59.5 percent turnout. It appears that turnout in India has stabilised around 60 percent which by international standard is very high, and given the frequency of elections in India impressive. Weather and dramatic issues increase, or reduce, the turnout by a mere 1–2 percentage points.

More importantly, the social base of participation has distinctly shifted downwards towards the countryside and the lower castes. Keeping up the trend inaugurated in 1989, the turnout in villages this time was 9 percent higher than in urban India (about 61 percent compared to roughly 52 percent), the odds of a scheduled caste citizen voting were 2.3 percent higher

than the national average, and the biggest increase in voting rates took place in the tribal constituencies. If there is any apathy towards voting, it is in India's metros and in their more affluent parts: Golf Links, Sundar Nagar, and Vasant Vihar in Delhi, for example.

There is another conceptual way of summarising India's democratic record. It has what might be called a democratic surplus. Using an economic analogy, one can say that democracy in India has become a *stock* variable; it is no longer a *flow* variable. Most stable democracies in the world happen to be the rich industrialised countries; where military coups or civilian suspensions of democracy do not take place; hence the basic features of the polity remain more or less unchanged. In poorer countries, where military coups can fundamentally alter the properties of the polity, as currently in Pakistan, democracy tends to be a *flow* variable. It can have huge ups and downs. India is poor but it has a stable democracy. All political military and civilian actors believe that elections are the only way to ascend to power. That is why democratic theorist recognise India as a striking exception to democratic theory: what it has achieved politically at a low levels of income is what only richer countries have. It has broken strong association between affluence and stable democracy.

A view of Indian democracy that so heavily relies on elections, and contestation, and participation therein, is heavily criticised in some intellectual quarters, especially on the left, both traditional and post-modern. For intellectuals within these traditions, India's democracy is a sham. In Jalal,¹ we have the

1. Ayesha Jalal : *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

most detailed statement of this view though softer versions can also be found in Bonner,¹ Brass² and Vanaik.³

According to this view, changes at the level of elections, and elected institutions are of little consequence so long as the social and economic inequalities of civil society remains unaltered, and the non-elected state institutions, especially the bureaucracy and police, continue to act in an authoritarian manner *vis-à-vis* the citizens, much as they used to do when the British ruled. For democracy to function in a real, not formal sense there has to be greater prior equality among its citizens. A deeply unequal society can't check authoritarian functioning of the state structures and therefore can not have a polity that is 'really' democratic.

'Democratic authoritarianism', Jalal argues, is the best way to describe India's polity and there are, she says, no fundamental differences between India and Pakistan, except at the level of political super-structure. Both have profound socio-economic inequalities and both have inherited insensitive, colonial state structures in which the non-elected institutions easily trump the elected powers-that-be.⁴

Thus, even when meticulously observed, elections are basically a 'ritual'. At best, they combine 'formal democracy, and covert authoritarianism'.⁵ If societies are unequal, the poor will inevitably be manipulated by the political elite.⁶ In its theoretical anchorage, we could say that this kind of reasoning is not new.

1. Arthur Bonner, et.al. : *Democracy in India : A Hollow Shell* (Washington: American University Press, 1994).

2. Paul Brass . *The Politics in India since Independence*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

3. Achin Vanaik : *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India*, (London: Verso, 1990).

4. Jalal, Ibid, pp. 249-50.

5. Ibid., p. 99.

6. Ibid, p. 48.

Commonly associated with Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Mosca and Pareto, it has a long lineage lasting over a century. Gramsci reasoned that so long the economically powerful had control over cultural means of a society-its newspaper, its education, its arts-they could establish a hegemony over the subaltern class and essentially obfuscate the subalterns about their own interests. And Mosca argued that in democracies, given their many inequalities, domination of a small elite is inevitable.

Should we, then, consider socio-economic equality a precondition for democracy? In the leading texts of democratic theory¹ the two basic criteria of democracy- contestation and participation- do not require socio-economic equality, they may affect, or be affected by, inequality. Democratic theorists expect that if socially or economically unequal citizens are politically equalised, and if the deprived constitute a majority of electorate, their political preferences would sooner or later, be reflected in who the rulers are and what public policies they adopt. By giving everyone equal vote, irrespective of prior resource -endowments, universal franchise creates the potential mechanisms for undermining vertical dependence of the deprived over the privileged. In Europe, labour parties pushing for workers' interests emerged in politics once franchise was extended to the working class.

Another well known theoretical point is germane to a discussion of inequalities, and democracy. If inequality, despite democratic institutions, comes in the way of a free expression of political preferences, such inequality makes a polity less democratic, but it does not make it undemocratic. So long as contestation and participation are available, democracy is a

1. See Robert Dahl : *On Democracy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) ; *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1989) ; *Polyarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

continuous variable (expressed as 'more or less'), not a dichotomous variable (expressed as 'yes or no'). Variations in degree and dichotomies should be clearly distinguished.

In the classic formulation of Robert Dahl, the United States was less of a democracy before the civil rights revolution of the mid-1960s though it can in future be even more democratic, if inequalities at the level of civil society come down further.¹ Similarly by allowing a great deal of contestation but restricting participation according to gender and class, England in the 19th century was less democratic than it is today, but it was democratic nonetheless, certainly by the 19th century standards. Given contestation and participation, greater equality certainly makes a polity more democratic, but greater equality, in and of itself, does not constitute democracy. There is no democracy without elections.

One should add that the claims above are empirical, not normative. They are not a defence of inequalities, nor do they imply that having universal franchise is better than having equality. Relative economic equality, for example, may well be a value in itself, and we may wish to defend it as such. But we should note that the economic equality may well be quite authoritarian: South Korea and Taiwan until the late 1980, China under Mao, and Singapore today come to mind. And societies with considerable economic inequality may have vibrant democracy: India and the US are both believed to have a Gini Coefficient of 0.4–0.45, as opposed to a more equal Gini Coefficient of 0.2–0.25 for the pre-1985 and authoritarian South Korea and Taiwan.² Precisely because economic equality and

1. Dahl, *Polyarchy*, p.-29.

2. The Gini Coefficient ranges between 0 and 1. The closer a country is to 1, the more unequal it is. Given similar Gini Coefficients, countries with higher per capita incomes (USA) would have far less poverty than those with lower per capita incomes (India).

democracy are analytically distinct, some people may quite legitimately be democrats but not believer in economic equality, others may believe in democracy as well as economic equality and still others may be democrats but indifferent to the question of economic equality. A similar argument can also be made about social inequalities.

In the light of the theoretical discussion above, what can we say about India. Has Indian democracy become more inclusive or not? And hasn't greater inclusion reduced social, if not economic, inequalities? In case social inequalities have come down as a consequence of the political process, it will, in the theoretical terms proposed above, make India more democratic, even though an inability to reduce economic inequalities will not make India's polity undemocratic.

Let us begin with a brief comparison of the caste composition of Indian politics today with the situation soon after the Independence. In the 1950s India's national politics was dominated by English speaking and urban politicians trained in law. Most politicians came from the upper castes, and many leaders were trained abroad. Lower down the political hierarchy, an agrarian and 'vernacular' elite dominated local and state politics,¹ but even the lower level political leadership tended to come from the upper castes in North India.

South India was different. Southern politicians were not only 'vernacular' but, as the 1950s evolved they were also increasingly from the lower castes.² By the 1960s, much of the South India had gone through a relatively peaceful lower caste

1. Myron Wiener: *Party Building in a New Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967).

2. See Robert Hardgrave : *The Dravidian Movement* . (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965); Narendra Subramanian : *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization, Political Parties, Citizens and Democracy in South India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

revolution : the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu as an anti-Brahmin party in the 1960s and the Communist party, first in power in Kerala in 1957, was primarily based in the Ezhava community, a low caste of traditional toddy tappers.¹

In the 1980s and 1990s, a southern style of plebeian politics has rocked North India. The names of Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mr. Laloo Yadav, Mr. Kanshi Ram, and Ms. Mayawati—all 'vernacular' politicians who have risen from the below—repeatedly make headlines. They are not united. Nonetheless, these and other lower caste leaders often make or break coalitions in power. Their total vote share continues to be lower than for the Congress and BJP respectively, but it is enough to force concessions from the two largest parties. In the three national elections held between 1996 and 1999, the various parties explicitly representing lower castes, in the aggregate, received between 18 to 20 percent of the national vote, as against 20–25 percent for the BJP, and 23–29 percent for the Congress party.²

Thus, disunity at the level of the political parties notwithstanding, lower caste politics has come to stay.³ It has as often noted, not only introduced a new colouring of phrases, diction and styles in politics, but also pressed the polity in new policy directions. An enlarged affirmative action programme and

1. Tom Nossiter : *Communism in Kerala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). In the two other South Indian states, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, a lower caste thrust in politics, through present, has been less pronounced.

2. Based on the Election commission of India, 1996, pp. 40–51, and Election Commission, 1998, pp. 49–56. *Statistical Report on General Elections*; Vol.1 (Delhi: Election Commission of India). The 1999 data are provisional. The explicitly lower caste parties are: JD (various versions), RJD, SP, BSP, JP, ADMK, DMK, MDMK, PMK, BJD and RPI.

3. In the 1999 elections, it was widely predicted that the lower castes parties in the North would be dealt a serious blow by the electorate. In UP, SP and BSP increased their share of seats, even as their votes marginally declined, in Bihar, RJD kept its vote share intact, but lost seats due to the BJP's superior coalition -making strategy.

an emerging restructuring of the power structure on the ground-street-level bureaucracies and police stations—are by far the most striking substantive success of such politicians. An extra 27 percent reservation for the lower castes to central government jobs and educational seats has been both added by Delhi and approved by the Supreme Court. In the 1950s, only 22.5 percent of such jobs were reserved, and more than three fourths were openly competitive. Today, these proportions are 49.5 and 50.5 percent respectively. At the state level, of course, the OBC quotas have been higher for a long time in southern India.

Indian politics, thus has a new lower caste thrust, now prevalent both in the North as well as the South. Democracy has become substantially indigenous, and the shadow of Oxbridge has left India's political centre stage. All of this is a clear sign of declining social inequalities, though we do not yet have very good data on whether economic inequality have also come down.

None of the above judgements should be construed to mean that India couldn't be made still more democratic. There is no doubt that many battles for social dignity and equality of the lower castes still lie ahead, even in South India, and so do the struggles for women and minorities. The emerging hostility between the upper OBCs and scheduled castes in several parts of the country is another example of an unfinished social transformation. However, there is no doubt left that democracy has already energised India's plebeian orders. They have challenged the traditional form of clientelistic politics and started fighting for greater power in the 1990s. As a consequence, India's democracy is deeper, but many democratic battles still remain.

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